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The youth bulge and higher education in Afghanistan: challenges and the way forward

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THE YOUTH BULGE AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

by

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June 2014

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The Afghan government is preparing to deal with the world's largest youth bulge, a demographic event that threatens to destabilize the country if the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies do not disarm the grievances of Afghan youth, especially at the university level. This thesis examines higher education in Afghanistan from the 1930s onward and describes how various regimes affected educational policy while in power. Also examined is how Afghan youth have historically been a source of instability if their grievances are not addressed. Despite tremendous efforts by the Afghan government and U.S. aid organizations to improve higher education after the Taliban era, implementing effective policies continues to problematic. This thesis answers the questions of why the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies have had such a difficult time in implementing effective policies to address the youth bulge and challenges to higher education in the country. Evidence is provided to show that poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, unqualified instructors, corruption, religious activism, insecurity, high levels of unemployment, and underemployment are detrimental to national stability, as Afghan youth flock abroad in pursuit of better opportunities or join the insurgency out of desperation.

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THE YOUTH BULGE AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Accountability and Transparency Program
AEC	Afghanistan Education Committee
AFMIS	Afghanistan Financial Management Information System
AISA	Afghanistan Investment Support Agency
AMYA	Afghan Ministry of Youth Affairs
ANDS	Afghan National Development Strategy
ANYP	Afghan National Youth Policy
AREU	Afghan Research Evaluation Unit
AUAF	American University of Afghanistan
BEST	Basic Education Support Systems for Teachers
ECA	Education Center for Afghanistan
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
IJC	Islamic Jihad Council
IIEP	Institute for Education Planning
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISI	Inter-Services Intelligence
JI	Jamiat-e-Islami
MDGS	Millennium Development Goals
MoE	Afghan Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoHE	Afghan Ministry of Higher Education
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NESP	National Education Strategic Plan
NJYP	National Joint Youth Program
OSSD	Office of Social Sector Development
SDSU	San Diego State University
SHEP	Strengthening of Higher Education Project
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNMC	University of Nebraska Medical Center
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YARC	Youth Activist Network for Reform and Change
YES Program	Youth Exchange and Study Program

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I. INTRODUCTION

"Education is the backbone of Afghanistan—it is the foundation for rebuilding the society."

—12th-grade boy in Herat[1]

While the United States gears for the graying of its population like most of the industrialized world, Afghanistan prepares to deal with the world's largest youth bulge: 65 percent of the population and growing at an annual rate of 2.8 percent.[2] The youth bulge refers to the disproportionate (more than 65 percent) representation of young people, aged 15 to 24, in the population.[3] A large youth population can be a boon to Afghan society, because its vigor and productive potential may spell economic gains and democratic action. On the other hand, terrible simplifiers, such as the Taliban's promise of financial incentives and social advancement for insurgents, could potentially sway the young people of Afghanistan if they have no other, better prospects.[4] Indeed, research conducted in 2010 postulates that a correlation exists between countries that have large youth populations and the likelihood of civil war or instability.[5]

Afghanistan is a war-ravaged country with high rates of unemployment, hovering at around 40 percent. While Afghanistan's most recent *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/2008* shows youth unemployment rates at

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[1] Fred M. Hayward, "Strategic Planning for Higher Education in Developing Countries: Challenges and Lessons," *Society for College and University Planning* 36, no. 5 (June, 2008): 6–7.

[2] Linda Lavender, "The Youth Bulge in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities," *Civil Military Fusion Center*, October 2011, 1, https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Social%20Well-being%20Archive/CFC_Afg_Youth_Bulge_Oct03.pdf.

[3] Lionel Beehner, "The Effects of 'Youth Bulge' on Civil Conflicts," *Council on Foreign Relations,* April 27, 2007, http://www.cfr.org/world/effects-youth-bulge-civil-conflicts/p13093.

[4] Norine MacDonald et al., "Afghanistan The Relationship Gap," *International Council on Security and Development*, July 2010, 46, http://www.icosgroup.net/static/reports/afghanistan_relationship_gap.pdf.

[5] Beehner, "The Effects of 'Youth Bulge.'"

10 percent, that relatively moderate figure conceals high levels of underemployment.[6] More than 90 percent of jobs are deemed "vulnerable employment."[7]

The 2014 withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces in Afghanistan portends a changed security and political scene for Afghanistan, with prominent voices from many quarters predicting at least some turmoil before the post-Taliban state and society gain the kind of traction that brings stability and prosperity to wide swaths of the population. Thus, Afghanistan might be the next victim of the youth-bulge theory, which asserts that a country's susceptibility to internal armed conflict, unrest, or political violence is related to the percentage of 15- to 24-year-olds in its population who have limited socioeconomic and political opportunities.[8]

Without a concerted intervention through policy and on-the-ground programs, particularly at the university level, the youth bulge threatens to unravel the progress made since the Taliban was ousted by allied forces in 2001. To remove a problematic regime is one thing, but to rebuild stabilizing institutions is another undertaking entirely. A failure to provide the young with options would have ramifications well beyond Afghanistan's borders. Its South Asian neighbors, particularly Pakistan, would face increased pressures from Afghan refugees displaced by rising violence and instability, as well as an increase in cross-border terrorism and the spread of extremism. In other words, without guidance or options, Afghanistan's youth could become a marginalized generation susceptible to insurgent recruitment.

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[6] ICON Institute*, National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2007/2008: A profile of Afghanistan* (Kabul, Afghanistan: Jehoon Printing Press, 2009), 26–28, https://www.google.com/search?q=%E2%80%9CNational+Risk+and+Vulnerability+Assessment+2007%2F2008%3A+A+profile+of+Afghanistan&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:en-U.S.:official&client=firefox-a#.

[7] Ibid., 26–28.

[8] Beehner, "The Effects of 'Youth Bulge.'"

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

This research examines what the trajectory of the higher-education system in Afghanistan has been since 2001 and what challenges and problems have this created for Afghanistan. Why is the youth bulge considered a threat to stability in the country? Despite the tremendous effort of the Afghan government and U.S. aid organizations to improve the higher education system after the Taliban era, why has implementing effective policies been so problematic?

B. IMPORTANCE

Empirical analysis reveals that a large male youth population (aged 15–29) increases the likelihood of civil conflict, particularly when this group does not have access to higher education and has limited employment opportunities.[9] The correlation between youth exclusion and political violence becomes especially profound when the youth demographic reaches 35 to 40 percent.[10] Today, some two-thirds of Afghanistan's population is below the age of 25.[11]

The United States has spent more than $600 billion in humanitarian and military assistance for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, but the results have been uneven, at best.[12] To be sure, rampant corruption, the booming opium trade, and meddling neighbor states (Pakistan and Iran) are other important factors that must be resolved, but the plight of Afghanistan's youth—young men as well as young women—must also be a top priority if Afghanistan is to achieve enduring peace.

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[9] Matthew Connelly, "Young and Restless Can Be a Volatile Mix," *Science*, July 29, 2011, 552–554, http://geography.sdsu.edu/News/images/2011/Science-2011-Hvistendahl-youth-bulge.pdf.

[10] Ibid., 552.

[11] Srinjoy Bosen, "Afghan Youth: Separating Fact from Fiction," *The Diplomat*, November 13, 2013, http://thediplomat.com/the-pulse/2013/11/13/afghan-youth-separating-fact-from-fiction/.

[12] Joel Brinkley, "Money Pit: The Monstrous Failure of U.S. aid to Afghanistan," *World Affairs Journal*, January/February 2013, http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/money-pit-monstrous-failure-us-aid-afghanistan; Anthony H. Cordesman, "The U.S. Cost of the Afghan War: FY 2002–2013," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*," May 15, 2012, http://csis.org/publication/us-cost-afghan-war-fy2002-fy2013.

So far, the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies have achieved negligible results in addressing the grievances of Afghan youth and providing opportunities for them to improve their socioeconomic conditions, as represented by poor access to quality higher education and high levels of unemployment and underemployment. Disillusionment and lack of financial and educational prospects make Afghan youth susceptible to permanently exiting the country or joining the insurgency, since the Taliban can offer hefty financial incentives and other social benefits.[13] Additionally, the failure to integrate the youth into nation-building efforts exacerbates anti-American sentiment and generates insecurity in the region. According to Jorritt Kaminga, the security transition of 2014 can potentially serve as the perfect "window of opportunity" for a renewed focus on youth engagement at the university level, which "could easily prove to be one of the most cost-effective and beneficial actions for future stability."[14]

A focus on university students by policy makers will be of utmost importance because they are the future leaders of Afghanistan and have the potential to promote peace in the region and development in the country. At the same time, history illustrates they can also disrupt a system if dissatisfied. In the 1970s, when the Afghan government could not create enough job opportunities for the rapidly increasing number of university graduates, Afghan youth held mass protests throughout the country. Discontent over grim employment prospects among the youth was a leading cause for the downfall of the monarchy in 1973, by a coup d'état led by Prime Minister Mohammad Daoud Khan.[15] While education is crucial to creating social change, the type of education delivered to beneficiaries must be suited to the country and its context.

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[13] Spencer Ackerman, "The Taliban Pays Its Troops Better than Karzai Pays His," *Wired*, July 26, 2010, http://www.wired.com/2010/07/taliban-pays-its-troops-better-than-karzai-pays-his/.

[14] Jorritt Kaminga, "From security transition to civilian power: Supporting Afghan youth after 2014," *Clingendael Policy Brief*, no. 8 (June, 2012): 1, http://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20120600_clingendael_policy_8.pdf.

[15] Yukitoshi Matsumoto, "Education for Demilitarizing Youth in Post-Conflict Afghanistan," *Research in Comparative and International Education* 3, no. 1 (January, 2008): 67.

C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES

There is considerable hope that Afghanistan's youth will be part of the stabilizing force and an important resource for national prosperity if the proper mechanisms are set in place at both the central and regional level. At this juncture, several issues face Afghan youth that both the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies must address. First, many universities cannot absorb the staggering number of high-school graduates. According to the ministry of higher education, in 2013 there were only 12,000 slots available for admission to universities, but more than 60,000 Afghan high-school students who applied.[16] Although private universities have been propped up throughout the country to absorb student demand, "inadequate capacity and lack of proper infrastructure" limit their ability to admit applicants.[17] Moreover, unlike public universities, private institutions charge high tuition rates that many Afghan students cannot afford.[18]

The second major issue is that those university students fortunate enough to gain entrance encounter significant challenges after enrollment. Mass protests throughout college campuses, including Faryab, Bamiyan, and Kabul universities, demonstrate youth frustration over severely outdated curricula, deteriorating facilities, and unqualified instructors.[19] Another major challenge is corruption in the education system. 'Ghost teachers' and bribery are significant issues that have hindered prospects of quality education.

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16 "Afghan youth are being neglected," *Watan*, accessed May 11, 2014, http://www.watan-afg.com/new_page_7.htm.

17 Rahima Baharustani, "Comprehensive Study of Higher Education in Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Investment Support Agency*, December 2012, 7, http://www.aisa.org.af/study/Comprehensive%20study%20of%20Higher%20Education%20in%20Afghanistan_2.pdf.

18 Ibid., 7–10.

19 "Afghan youth are being neglected."

Religious activism in Afghan universities is another concern, because of its potential negative implications.[20] Religious activism becomes a problem when extremist elements drown out the voices of moderates at the universities. Should extreme religiosity increase among the college-age demographic, it could translate into more rigid Islamist policies in the future, which in turn could hinder prospects for democratization and development in the country, particularly for women.

At this juncture, religiosity within various Afghan universities, particularly in Pashtun-dominated regions, is relatively strong, given the ethnic affinity with the Taliban and culturally conservative views. In Jalalabad University, Islamist groups have increased in popularity as a response to the "aggressively secular behavior of the chancellor of the university."[21] Many religious students have accused the chancellor of propagating anti-Islamic messages by insisting that classes be gender-integrated in the Sharia faculty. The chancellor has also been accused of appointing members only from the secular-based political group Afghan Millat to the university.[22] In this particular instance, religiosity is a consequence of the chancellor's push for secularization upon a traditionally conservative student body. Nevertheless, in general, the prevalence of extremist religious activism and methods of circumventing it in Afghan universities must be addressed.

Afghan youth who feel protests have been futile and are either unwilling or unable to migrate the country often resort to joining the insurgency as a means of

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[20] Ibid., "Poverty and Unemployment Forcing People to Join Terror Outfits: Swedish Diplomat," *Tolo News*, October 8, 2013, http://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/11381-poverty-and-unemployment-forcing-people-to-join-terror-outfits-swedish-diplomat?lang=fa&device=desktop; Given that Afghanistan is a predominantly Muslim country (98 percent), the majority of Afghan university students identify as Muslim as well.

[21] Anotionio Giustozzi, "Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit,* March 26, 2010, 12, http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/handle/123456789/27967.

[22] Ibid., 13.

sustenance for themselves and their families.[23] Afghan experts, including the Swedish diplomat to Afghanistan, Henrik Linder Halm, and Guy Wilobe, the head of the Hello Trust Foundation, have repeatedly expressed concern that the lack of access to educational opportunities and staggering youth unemployment rates are the leading reasons for many Afghan youth to join the insurgency.[24] Afghan youth in Khost and Faryab province, as well as ex-Taliban fighters, have stated that limited socioeconomic opportunities led them to engage in robberies and join criminal groups or the Taliban.[25]

Afghan youth are also faced by the challenges of poor quality of instruction in universities, which results in the inability to find employment. These students are desperate to make headway and eager to rebuild their country, but see little potential for social mobility, despite the billions in aid money provided by the United States. Students feeling disillusioned about their future in Afghanistan have fled by the thousands to neighboring countries, including Iran, Pakistan, and India, for better economic opportunities.[26] Thousands of other desperate young Afghans have tried to illegally smuggle themselves by sea to European countries.[27] Currently, Italy reports more than 4,000 illegal Afghans between 19 and 24 years of age.[28] Hundreds of others have lost their lives during the journey or been deported.

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[23] "Students protest at Bamiyan University," Watan-e-Afghanistan, April 14, 2005, http://farsi.alarabiya.net/fa/afghanistan/2013/10/23/حکومت-سقوط-مورد-در-پاکی-ماین-موسسه-یک-رئیس-داد-هشدار-افغانستان.html.

[24] "Poverty and Unemployment Forcing People to Join Terror Outfits."

[25] Sadaf Shinwari, "Unemployment boost insurgency and crime," *Khama Press*, May 27, 2013, http://www.khaama.com/unemployment-boost-insurgency-and-crime-9000900.

[26] "As 2014 NATO pullout approaches, more Afghans flee their homeland," *Washington Post*, January 30, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/liveblog/wp/2013/01/30/as-2014-nato-pullout-approaches-more-afghans-flee-their-homeland/.

[27] Ibid., "Afghans illegally leaving the country," Youtube Video, posted by Ahmad Fawad Ahmady, July 4, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DL7qi_Dw_oI, http://www.watan-afg.com/new_page_7.htm.

[28] "Afghans illegally leaving the country." Abid Amiri, "Why Are Afghans Leaving Afghanistan," *Diplomatic Courier*, January 31, 2012, http://www.diplomaticourier.com/news/regions/central-asia/367-why-are-afghans-leaving-afghanistan.

Essentially, access to quality higher education is crucial for Afghan youth because it provides avenues for social mobility, an important stabilizer. While other institutions also need to cooperate to foster an economy that will provide jobs, education is the first step to stabilizing the country for youth.[29] According to a 2013 World Bank Report, higher education establishes and sustains a democratic society by offering intellectual leadership and the ability to examine what form of political democracy best suits a particular society.[30] Higher education can also play a pivotal role in transforming a country's deeply cultural and religious traditions into more progressive ideals. Higher education can potentially "cultivate democratic values in students by modeling a culture of tolerance and rejection of discrimination based on ethnicity, gender or religious belief."[31] The existing structural methods in universities have had some positive results; however, the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies can do much more to improve instructional quality without seriously undermining other priorities or concerns. Lack of access to quality higher education, the potential for extremist religious activism within universities, unemployment, and insecurity continue to threaten the country.

The most challenging aspect of this research is to identify new paradigms and opportunities that will improve the quality of higher education in public institutions, address extremist religious activism in universities, and create specific guidelines or suggestions for increasing employment opportunities for university graduates. Moreover, it is difficult to assess how U.S. aid agencies can assist the Afghan government to help overcome impediments to higher education.

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[29] Harsha Aturupane, *Higher Education in Afghanistan: An Emerging Mountainscape* (Washington: World Bank, August 2013), 3–5, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2013/09/05/000333037_20130905112816/Rendered/PDF/809150WP0Afgha0Box0379822B00PUBLIC0.pdf.

[30] Ibid., 3–5.

[31] Ibid.,6–9.

D. METHODS AND SOURCES

The proposed analysis will be an exploratory case study that will look at the history of higher education in Afghanistan. Scholarly writings and news briefs by local Afghans on current challenges in achieving quality higher education and youth employment are analyzed. The author's fluency in the Dari and Urdu languages allows access to blogs, posts, journal entries, and Afghan news media to gauge the sentiments of Afghan youth. A variety of official statistical analyses and reports produced by the World Bank, UNESCO, Amnesty International, USAID, and the Afghan ministries of higher education and labor are also reviewed and put in political and social context. Also analyzed is what U.S.-led allies have achieved so far and whether their objectives have met the needs of Afghan youth.

E. THESIS OVERVIEW

Chapter II provides the history of higher education in Afghanistan, the background of Afghanistan's political system, and how the various government regimes affected educational policy while in power. Sections will examine the eras of Mohammad Zahir Shah (1933–1973), President Daoud Khan (1973–1979), Soviet rule (1979–1989), Mujahadeen rule (1992–1996), Taliban rule (1996–2001), and GIROA (2001–present). This chapter demonstrates how these political groups focused on higher education as a means of promulgating their ideology (whether communism, Islamism, or democracy) and shows the impact students have historically made in ousting regimes because their grievances were not met.

Chapter III examines U.S.-led efforts after 2001 to advance higher education in Afghanistan and the results thus far. Subsections note the accomplishments of U.S. agencies and show problems that remain or have emerged from current developments. Chapter IV looks at the challenges the Afghan government and U.S. organizations are facing with regard to higher education in Afghanistan. Evidence is provided to show that poor infrastructure,

outdated curricula, unqualified instructors, corruption, religious activism, insecurity, high levels of unemployment, and underemployment have adversely affected the country, as Afghan youth flock abroad in pursuit of better educational and economic opportunities or join the insurgency out of desperation.[32] This section also looks at security challenges, the extent of extremist religious activism in Afghan universities, and whether extremism is hindering democratization in the country. Chapter V concludes with a summary of results, recommendations, and concluding points.

F. LITERATURE REVIEW: HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE YOUTH BULGE

The following literature review examines various theories concerning the role of education in modernizing a developing country. While a young population is a boon to society, it can also be highly problematical if the needs of the young are not met and no proper mechanisms are in place to provide educational opportunities, particularly at the university level. Impediments to higher education in developing countries and possible solutions are discussed. The literature not only highlights the significance of higher education, but also the importance of contextualizing types of education that cater to the country. Essentially, there is no universal blueprint to outline what higher education should look like. Instead, a plan depends on a given country's conditions and capabilities.

1. Modernization Theory and Higher Education

Modernization theory asserts that developing countries can attain economic and social growth by emulating the processes followed by developed countries.[33] One way of looking at modernization theory is as a linear path.

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[32] Bijoyeta Das, "Afghan Students Travel to India in Search of Higher Education," *Thinkbrigade*, July 30, 2012, http://thinkbrigade.org/development/story-for-review-afghan-students/index.html.

[33] Walt W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); According to M.J. Kelly, education is defined as an "organized and sustained communication process designed to bring about learning." M.J. Kelly, *The Origins and Development of Education in Zambia: Pre Colonial Times to 1996* (Lusaka: Image Publishers, 1999).

Walter Rostow, a leading exponent of the idea that modernization has a sequential path, postulates a five-stage model for development: first, starting from a traditional society, conditions for “takeoff” in the second stage must be present. The third stage is takeoff, followed by a drive to maturity in stage four and ending with high mass consumption in stage five. According to Rostow, a traditional society is one characterized by subsistence agriculture with limited economic mobility. The conditions for takeoff are an increased spread distribution of technology, investment in production expansion, and relative improvement in individual social mobility. Afghanistan would currently fall under the second stage in Rostow’s model. Although education plays a paramount and direct role in all of Rostow’s stages of development, it figures most prominently in the second stage, which Afghanistan might have just barely reached.

According to Rostow, as individuals in a traditional society develop innovative irrigation and farming techniques, they gain more free time because of improved living standards. They can think beyond mere sustenance and become more cognizant of their role in society and of other ways of investing, such as manufacturing. This newfound knowledge enables individuals to think in broader terms and perhaps be willing to consider getting involved in the market as investors. Education plays a critical role throughout the development phase, because it allows individuals to recognize their rights and privileges in society, which can potentially induce democratization.

From Rostow’s perspective, Afghanistan is at a pivotal juncture because in the past decade, there has been increased investment in agricultural production, technology, and education. At noted, Afghanistan has likely arrived at Rostow’s second stage of development. If the Afghan government can provide greater access to quality education, especially at the university level, Afghan youth can advance the country to the third stage: the takeoff stage.

In takeoff, Afghan youth could be expected to contribute to increased urbanization, industrialization, technological breakthroughs, and capital accumulation. After Afghanistan achieved a long period of self-sustaining growth,

the country could reach a drive to maturity. Rostow would define this stage "as the period when a country has effectively applied the range of modern technology to the bulk of its resources."[34] At this point, the Afghan economy might find its place in the international economy, poverty rates might decline, and the standard of living might increase. Afghanistan could then reach the final stage, high mass consumption, which means that Afghan consumers would focus on durable goods. In addition, the country would have options as to whether it wanted to focus on military and security problems or welfare and equality. All the aforementioned scenarios are merely hypothetical, but if Rostow's theory is true, developing countries such as Afghanistan must traverse each of these stages to reach modernity. Embracing Rostow's theory means acknowledging a linear path to modernization for developing countries.

Theorists including Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel challenge this linear approach.[35] They argue that development is non-deterministic, since a "given country's leaders and nation specific events also matter."[36] More importantly, Inglehart and Welzel posit that modernization is not permanent, since it can be reversed by economic collapse. They dismiss the notion that economic development per se will inevitably change worldviews. They emphasize that religious and historical heritages leave "a lasting imprint" and cite the difficulty of breaking them down. Both authors state that economic development causes enduring social change, which increases individual self-expression. As individuals become more aware of their rights, social phenomena such as civil society, gender equality, and democratization begin to emerge. Ingelhart and Welzel do not discuss the importance of education in the modernization process, but self-expression implicitly occurs once individuals become educated and aware of the world around them. Therefore, education is

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[34] Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, 2, 38, 59.

[35] Ronald Inglehart and Christian Wetzel, "Changing Mass Priorities: The link between modernization and Democracy*," Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 552.

[36] Ibid.

an important aspect in stabilization and development, whether one offers a modernization perspective or a critical one.

While modernization theory has positive aspects, it assumes that all societies should follow the "successful" path established by Western societies. Dean C. Tipps points to this assumption in arguing that modernization theory "evaluates the progress of nations compared to that proximity of Western institutions and values."[37] Although education and industrialization are important for developing countries, Tipps posits that advancing the cause of modernization often enables Western countries to engage in "cultural imperialism," because they see their version of development as the correct method for modernization, which should be applied to all societies.[38] Tipps uses the example of European colonialism to demonstrate how the British justified their imperial ambitions under the guise of "modernizing" traditional, and what of they believed to be "primitive," societies.[39] Another example is the U.S. during the Cold War, in which the U.S. sought to avert Communist expansion and establish cultural hegemony by exporting Western values throughout the third world. While Western patterns of modernization may cause the entry of external players, most scholars agree that some elements of it are necessary. It is the implementation that needs to be customized to protect local communities, as the case in Afghanistan will illustrate. We see in Afghanistan the importance of being culturally sensitive to the society while trying to pursue to modernization.

Occupational specialization, urbanization, and most importantly, rising educational levels bring about modernization, and increase the likelihood of democratization. The type of democracy embraced, however, may not be the Western form. Although Afghans have embraced democratic elections, as evidenced by the mass turnout (60 percent) in the 2014 presidential elections,

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[37] Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15, no. 2 (March, 1973): 203–204, 206.

[38] Ibid., 210.

[39] Ibid., 210–211.

they generally have negative associations with "democracy."[40] Hundreds of interviews conducted by the Afghan Research Evaluation Unit (AREU) "indicate that the idea of democracy [for Afghans] extends far beyond elections and parliamentary politics to encompass an entire package of Western liberal values, where freedom is equated with an absence of rules, immorality, and secularism."[41] Though Afghans may accept certain aspects of the democratic process if they are seen to be compatible with local customs and traditions, they will not embrace the liberalized form of democracy practiced in the West if it runs counter to Afghan religious and cultural values.[42] Thus, modernization critics argue that even if the end goal for modernization theorists is democratization, it might not resemble the type of democracy they envisioned. Therefore, development has to be customized to the concept.

Tipps also adds that modernization theory has made "tradition" the antithesis of modernity. He argues that these two concepts do not have to be mutually exclusive, because "traditional values and systems facilitate rather than impede social changes associated with modernization."[43] He therefore calls "for approaches to modernization that avoid dubious assumptions concerning the nature of traditional institutions and their contribution to the modernization process."[44] This is a significant point, because while modernization can be perceived as transitional, abandoning all existing traditions for the sake of achieving modernity may not be necessary. For example, in a more tailored form of democracy, Afghanistan's traditional jirgas (assemblies) could continue. The jirga tradition dates back at least three centuries and brings together elders and

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[40] Ana Larson and Oliver Lough, "Afghan Perspectives on 'democracy,'" *Foreign Policy*, February 9, 2011, http://southasia.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/09/afghan_perspectives_on_democracy.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study," 210.

[44] Ibid., 216.

community leaders to discuss matters of importance to the village, such as tribal disputes and domestic concerns.

While the *Loya Jirga* focuses on national matters, the council of elders in the local jirgas has the authority to implement decisions at the local level.[45] Local jirgas can play a significant role in influencing traditionally conservative Afghan parents in rural parts of the country to allow their children, especially girls, to attend school. More often than not, Afghan villagers adhere to the dicta of their local leaders more than those of the central government.[46] This acceptance of traditional organization may allow many Afghan youth to attend school with their parents' and community leaders' blessing. If parents throughout Afghanistan commonly refuse to allow their children to enroll in school, this will have negative implications for the youth bulge—a large youth population will fail to acquire an education and will likely become embittered by limited prospects. While the United States has turned to jirgas for advice, the Afghan government has not capitalized on the significance that it can have in insurgent prone or conservative areas throughout the country.

2. Youth Bulge

Youth can play a pivotal role in modernization. According to the World Bank, more than of half the world's population is now below the age of 25, of which 1.5 billion are classified as youth, and 86 percent live in the developing world.[47] Most of the literature on countries experiencing the youth bulge postulate several alternative scenarios: civil unrest, radicalization, or human and economic development. The chances of violence and radicalization among youth are dramatically increased if the state, private sector, and international-aid

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[45] Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Consultative Loya Jirga*, accessed May 21, 2014, http://jirga.gov.af/en.

[46] Ali Wardak, *Jirga: A Traditional Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in Afghanistan* (UK: University of Glamorgan, 2003).

[47] World Bank, *World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development* (Washington, 2005), 4, 33, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2005/09/20/000112742_20050920110826/Rendered/PDF/322040World0Development0Report02006.pdf.

agencies fail to address incipient challenges. The existing literature therefore emphasizes the importance of universal access to quality education and employment opportunities as a means of averting conflict and militancy.[48]

As expressed in the UNDP *Arab Human Development Report*, the youth-bulge phenomenon is a double-edged sword, in that it "presents both challenges and opportunities."[49] Furthermore, it is contingent on "whether countries can use the human potential represented by their populations well enough to satisfy people's aspirations for a fulfilling life."[50] Failure to invest in the young not only can be not only "a force for immiseration," but also a source for potentially dangerous consequences, namely, rebellion or insurgencies.[51] According to Population Action International (PAI), a Washington-based advocacy group, between "1970 and 1999, 80 percent of civil conflicts occurred in countries [Angola, Tanzania, Yemen, Syria, Chad, Congo] where 60 percent of the population or more were under the age of thirty."[52] This data demonstrates the significant negative impact the youth bulge can have in a society.

3. Higher Education

Educational scholars, including Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, posit that in countries experiencing a youth bulge, expanding public access to education makes rebel recruitment more costly and rebellion less likely.[53] Essentially, they argue that if youth are fully invested and relatively content with their lives, they

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[48] Bilal Barakat and Henrik Urdal, "Breaking the Waves: Does Education Mediate the Relationship Between Youth Bulge and Political Violence," *World Bank* (Africa: World Bank, 2009): 4.

[49] United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Arab Human Development Report 2002* (New York, New York: UNDP, 2002), 36–37, http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2002e.pdf.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., 36.

[52] Richard Cincotta et al., "The Security Demographic – Population and Civil Conflict After the Cold War," *Population Action International*, August 1, 2003, http://populationaction.org/reports/the-security-demographic-population-and-civil-conflict-after-the-cold-war/#sthash.eB2Njui3.dpuf.

[53] Barakat and Urdal, "Breaking the Waves," 3–4.

are less likely to join an insurgency.[54] Collier emphasizes the overall importance of education. Fuller agrees with Collier and adds that higher education may not induce stability right away, but it contributes to the long-term development of a country.[55] According to a report conducted by the Afghanistan Investment Support Agency (AISA), higher education adds skills to the labor force that enhance productivity. The report adds that higher education improves workers' employment stability because it allows them to maintain their jobs or find new jobs "in the face of changing economic conditions."[56] Higher education also increases the standard of living and makes individuals resistant to political manipulation.[57]

In Afghanistan, youth and their families realize the importance of receiving an education, as seen in the staggering re-enrollment of students after the fall of the Taliban.[58] The difficulty is not trying to convince the young to attain an education; rather, it is the quality of education received. The primary issue is that there is a disconnect between educational offerings and market needs and expectations. If Afghan youth are not receiving an education that meets international standards, then it becomes a problem. They will be graduating, but because they have not received the proper training and acquired the necessary skills at the university to make them competitive, they will have limited employment prospects. University graduates disillusioned with their living conditions will gravitate towards three alternative courses of action: one, engage in protests to demand that the Afghan government address their grievances; two, leave the country to pursue greater opportunities; or three, join the insurgency out of frustration or desperation.

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54 Ibid.

55 Fuller, "The Youth Factor," VII.

56 Baharustani, "Comprehensive Study of Higher Education in Afghanistan," VII.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

4. An Alternative to Higher Education: Madrassas

Providing access to higher education is an important goal; however, according to Jim Miller, the reality is that many youth, particularly in Muslim countries, are unable to attend universities for a number of reasons, including financial constraints, failure to pass the Concord exams (university entry tests), and the state's inability to accommodate the throngs applying.[59] A report released by Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) states that in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the only alternative for these youth is to attend madrassas (religious schools).[60] Existing literature often depicts madrassas in a negative light and as "hate factories."[61] Although madrassas claim to teach some secular subjects, the greatest emphasis is put on teaching the "Islamic value system, world view, and code of conduct."[62] While ideally this is not a problem, because many madrassas provide educational services in places a developing state cannot reach, a new version of political Islam has found its way into some of these schools.

Radical political Islam is a significant problem in Afghanistan. According to Gulab Mangal, the governor of Helmand province in Afghanistan, "the new generation of teachers exiled in Pakistan" have brought with them a rigid version of Islam that "brainwash[es] students and teach[es] them religious extremism,

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[59] Jim Miller, "News from Afghanistan: Higher Education Needs the Support of International Partners," *Institute of International Education*, March 11, 2013, http://www.iie.org/Blog/2013/March/News-from-Afghanistan.

[60] "Pakistan: Madrassas Fill Education Gap," *IRIN*, October 24, 2012, http://www.irinnews.org/report/96628/pakistan-madrasas-fill-education-gap-in-karachi-hotspot; Abigail Cutler and Saleem Ali, "Madrassah reform is key to terror war," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 2005, http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0627/p09s02-coop.html; Hassan Zaidi, "Over to the General; Monitoring madrassas-potential breeding grounds for extremism is as serious challenge for Musharraf as reining in militants," *India Today*, August 1, 2005; P. W. Singer, "Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a System of Education not Jihad," *Brookings Institute*, November 1, 2001, http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2001/11/pakistan-singer.

[61] Suba Chandran, "Pakistan: Deciphering 'Hate Factories,'" *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, October 10, 2013, http://www.ipcs.org/article/peace-and-conflict-database-pakistan/pakistan-deciphering-hate-factories-4137.html.

[62] Kaja Borchgrevink, "Transnational links of Afghan madrasas: Implications for the reform of religious education," *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 43, no. 1 (2013): 73.

[and] armed jihad."[63] As Fuller argues, madrassas in both countries are notorious for promulgating anti-Western and anti-state sentiments, as well as condoning violence.[64] The spread of anti-state sentiments among the young can affect their desire to seek tertiary education in the future. Rather than scouting for scholarships or trying to reapply to the university system the following year, youths can become radicalized in these madrassas and end up joining the insurgency.

While it may be true that madrassas espouse extremist rhetoric and promote jihad, it is also important to consider, as Jack A. Goldstone argues, that disillusioned youth in Muslim countries often turn to Islam to establish a sense of identity that goes beyond their financial or social status.[65] Because these youth are not able to improve their social status in this world, the hope is that they can earn rewards in the next world.[66] Consequently, militant groups exploit Muslim youths' newfound religiosity. According to Gunnar Heinsohn, the German social scientist who first coined "youth bulge" in the 1990s, Muslim youths are especially vulnerable to rigid and draconian strands of Islam.[67] Fuller agrees, but argues that while in the 19th and 20th centuries, Arab nationalism or Marxism-Leninism prevailed, and both encouraged extremist rhetoric in response to social grievances, Islamic fundamentalism has now gained significant traction with Muslim youths and has served as the primary vehicle for radicalization.[68] Fareed Zakaria postulates that the amalgamation of the youth bulge, stagnant economies, and social change have created the perfect storm for a militant

63 Ibid., 76.

64 Fuller, "The Youth Factor," 16.

65 Beehner, "The Effects of 'Youth Bulge.'"

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Fuller, "The Youth Factor," 18.

Islamic resurgence in the Muslim world.[69] It is worth noting that thirteen of the twenty-seven largest youth-bulge societies are Muslim countries.[70]

Fuller's theory that a desire for swift justice and willingness to initiate any action to achieve it is therefore more applicable than Fraser's theory, which states that youth, especially if they are younger than twenty, are drawn to radicalism due to an "underdeveloped death concept." In other words, youth cannot psychologically comprehend or understand the gravity of death.[71] Fuller states that societies incapable of carrying out justice often stimulate radicalized action, particularly among the young. This situation arises, Fuller believes, in part because "youth have far less to lose, are less patient, less cautious, and are more susceptible to overdrawn and simplistic radical analyses of existing social problems, their source and solution."[72]

Youth grievances and feelings of injustice are serious concerns in Afghanistan. Afghan youth in rural provinces such as Khost are increasingly joining Islamist groups and insurgencies over perceived and real grievances. Their activities include "night raids and the killing and detention of villagers" and expressing overall dissatisfaction with the Afghan government's ability to improve economic conditions and educational opportunities.[73] Basically, the government's failure to carry out justice and provide opportunities often compels youth in these conservative regions to seek alternative leaders whom they perceive as more capable.[74] While this is perceived as conservatism, lack of effective government policy regarding education and employment may be playing a significant role. Realizing this, the Afghan government, rather than shut the madrassas down, in

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69 Fareed Zakaria, "The Roots of Rage," *Newsweek* 138, no. 16 (2001).

70 Beehner, "The Effects of 'Youth Bulge.'"

71 M. Fraser, *Children in Conflict* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1974).

72 Fuller, "The Youth Factor," 19.

73 Uri Friedman, "The Newfound Political Power of Afghan Youth," *The Atlantic*, April 5, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/04/the-newfound-political-power-of-afghan-youth/360216/.

74 Ibid.

2008, it tried to incorporate them into the state education system. Hanif Atmar the education minister explained why the government took such a route:

> We are critical of policies in the past. Actually it was a result of those policies to exclude these madrassas, keep them on the margin of the society, and then entirely hand them over to the fundamentalists.[75]

The reform required that madrassas teach subjects related to Islam 40 percent of the time, but the remaining 60 percent would include basic subjects such as math, geography, science, and literature. Many madrassas fervently opposed the reform, arguing that the primary focus should be reciting and memorizing the Quran, and there simply was not enough time to work on non-Islamic subjects. Despite its efforts, the Afghan government continues to struggle in bringing madrassas into the state system because of the pushback from the conservative mullahs at the madrassas who want to remain autonomous. Lack of funding and capability, as well as a coherent strategy has been the primary reasons.

5. Response to Lack of Access to Quality Higher Education: Peaceful Protests

According to Ferguson, two things often occur when there are limited socioeconomic opportunities: violence and exit. Ferguson fails to mention a third option: engagement in peaceful protest and political activism within the country. Fuller properly articulates that just because youth, specifically those who are educated, are limited in social mobility, does not automatically mean they will turn to militancy or flee the country. He states that the presence of cohorts of educated youth leads to increased "political expectations and demands on the part of a student population who will challenge more aggressively the weaknesses and failures of the state and its leaders."[76] He further argues that educated youths are pivotal in challenging the status quo; in the Arab Spring,

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[75] David Loyn, "Bid to Transform Afghan Madrassas," *BBC News*, January 11, 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/7182927.stm.

[76] Fuller, "The Youth Factor," VII.

"youth played a central role in sparking [peaceful] protest movements across the Middle East," which eventually brought down over 40 years of dictatorship.[77] Stephanie Schwartz argues that youth in conflict-prone countries such as Afghanistan should not be pigeonholed as either destabilizers or passive victims. She posits that, instead, youth can serve as agents of change, leaders in peace building, and contributors to the reconstruction process.[78] This can certainly be the case among Afghan youth in Afghanistan. In fact, the question that emerges is how can policy present them from going from peaceful protests to radical behavior and what role is the educational policy playing in this.

Afghan youth have historically played a pivotal role in challenging the status quo by engaging in protests to demand for change. Afghan university students in Kabul, Heart, Mazar-e-Sharif, Bamiyan, and Faryab are currently street leading demonstrations demanding that the government address the challenges youth are facing, including lack of access to quality education, limited employment opportunities, and security concerns.[79] Afghan youth are also at the forefront of political engagement, as evidenced by their massive turnout in the 2014 presidential elections. Although the Taliban vowed to "violently disrupt the elections, in part by reprising a 2009 tactic of attacking people with blue ink on their finger," Afghan youth went to the polling stations in large numbers. One week before the elections, representatives of the Kabul-based Youth Activist Network for Reform and Change (YARC), "an umbrella organization of social and

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[77] Fuller, "The Youth Factor," 3; Stephanie Schwartz, "Youth and the 'Arab Spring,'" *The United States Institute of Peace*, April 28, 2011, http://www.usip.org/publications/youth-and-the-arab-spring.

[78] Stephanie Schwartz, "Youth and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Agents of Change," *United States Institute of Peace,* May 1, 2010, 2, http://www.usip.org/publications/youth-and-post-conflict-reconstruction.

[79] "Afghan youth are being neglected," *Watan*, accessed May 11, 2014, http://www.watan-afg.com/new_page_7.htm.

civil-society groups that includes some 300,000 members, inked their fingers to encourage Afghans to participate in the election despite Taliban threats."[80]

Although Afghan youth are not monolithic, many educated youth are engaging in the political process to bring about stability and economic and social opportunities for other youth in the country. In March 2014, Afghanistan's election commission "reported that young people constituted a staggering 70 percent of provincial council candidates across the country (YARC itself has put forward more than 35 candidates for provincial councils)."[81] These educated youths are paving the future for Afghanistan and, as articulated by Fuller and Schwartz, they have not resorted to violence or joined the insurgency. Instead, they have expressed their concerns through peaceful protest and active political engagement. While these youths have chosen to take a different route to address their grievances, there remains a large number of Afghan youth who are not so willing and patient.

6. The Exit Option

Lack of educational and job opportunities, as Ferguson points out, has led to mass—and often illegal—migrations of young people to neighboring countries. Essentially, in war-torn or post-conflict countries, when promises of development collapse, mass exits can ensue.[82] Yukitoshi Matsumoto points to Afghan youths in particular, who have begun flocking to neighboring Pakistan and Iran in hopes of a better future. Matsumoto's research finds that Afghan youths often seek jobs at the UN, not for the purpose of nation building, but to form beneficial affiliations that increase the likelihood of receiving foreign visas that will allow them to permanently leave the country.[83] This exodus depletes the country of the

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[80] Uri Friedman, "The Newfound Political Power of Afghan Youth," *The Atlantic*, April 5, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/04/the-newfound-political-power-of-afghan-youth/360216/.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Yukitoshi Matsumoto, "Young Afghans in 'transition' towards Afghanistan, exit or violence," *Conflict, Security & Development* 11, no. 5 (November, 2011): 557–558.

[83] Ibid., 571.

educated youth who can potentially contribute to economic development and stability in the country.[84] Often, the individuals left in in post-conflict countries are warlords and impoverished people, who, according to Sam Weir, have limited ability to bring development and peace.[85] Since young, intellectually capable individuals are needed to rebuild a country, particularly in post-conflict regions, their flight cripples development.

7. Final Notes

As stated earlier, higher education is of paramount importance in the development of third-world countries; however, Bilal Barakat and Henrik Urdal argue that the state has to be cognizant of the ramifications of expanding access to higher education at a rapid pace without a coherent plan.[86] Alan Richards and John Waterbury similarly state that the biggest challenge Muslim countries face is their inability to absorb university enrollments. The rapid expansion of universities has resulted in major problems, such as overcrowding, which hinders the overall learning environment.[87] In addition, Fuller argues that Afghan curricula fail to provide adequate technical and training skills to prepare students for the economy of a modern country. He asserts that poor education often translates to an inferior workforce that hampers the economy and offers minimal interest to foreign investors. This circumstance, in turn, inhibits the country's ability to integrate and compete globally.[88] While this may explain why youth are unable to acquire jobs, it is not clear in Afghanistan whether the job market is also providing pertinent employment as the country is rebuilding its war-ridden economy. Although the aforementioned authors describe the problem, they offer few policy prescriptions.

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[84] Sam Weir, "The Struggle For Afghanistan's Youth," *The Guardian*, June 29, 2011, http://www.theguardian.com/journalismcompetition/the-struggle-for-afghanistans-youth.

[85] Obaid Younossi, "A Brain Drain Threatens Afghanistan's Future," *New York Times*, February 9, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/09/opinion/09iht-edyounossi.html?_r=0.

[86] Barakat and Urdal, "Breaking the Waves."

[87] Fuller, "The Youth Factor," 62.

[88] Ibid., 15.

Jorrit Karaminga provides the most significant recommendation, and that is for the United States to focus less on the Afghan National Army and police, which often comprise young, illiterate recruits, and more on the youth who have potential to be the future leaders of Afghanistan.[89] He argues that the U.S. strategy within the past decade has been to get Afghan security forces to effectively take over security control in 2014. Consequently, other cohorts of young people have been severely neglected. He suggests investing in foreign language and IT courses, as well as "better professional training for teachers, and schools and universities that are more 'plugged in' to the international academic system."[90] This is certainly a step in the right direction, because language fluency, particularly in English, makes youth more competitive in the market.

All in all, the existing literature provides a rich understanding of the challenges to higher education in developing countries, and the implications of the youth bulge are comprehensively covered. Whereas much of the literature emphasizes the importance of universal access to higher education for youth, practical recommendations for improving the quality of and access to higher education fall short, and there is no order of importance outlined for primary, secondary, and tertiary education. While touting universal policy prescriptions for improving higher education is an easy task, its successful application is a completely different matter. Addressing the youth bulge in Afghanistan requires a multifaceted approach tailored to the country. It requires methods that not only improve access to higher education, but also quality, so that university graduates are well trained and equipped to compete successfully in the job market.

89 Kaminga, "From Security Transition," 3.

90 Ibid., 4.

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II. HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

This chapter provides a brief history of Afghanistan's political and educational system from the 1930s onward, demonstrating how, from the 1970s, the changing regimes historically focused on higher education as a means of inculcating youth with a specific ideology. Also examined is how Afghan youth have deposed governments or induced instability if their needs were not met in the past. Education policy after 2001 is discussed, as well as government successes, including increased enrollment and facilities. This chapter concludes by arguing that the current government has made some improvements to higher education in Afghanistan, but much more is still needed, especially since Afghanistan is experiencing a youth bulge.

A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Higher education in Afghanistan was not established until 1932, when King Mohamad Zahir Shah's father, Mohammad Nadir Shah, created the first faculty of physical sciences at Kabul University.[91] Later under King Zahir Shah, higher education became a priority. Kabul University was the first public university built in 1946. It was established with the help of Turkish professor Fagih Kamil Baig, who created additional faculties, including medicine and agriculture. During the Cold War, Afghanistan accepted both Russian and Western aid and became one of the "premiere universities in the region."[92] Students who passed their exams during their senior year were often sent abroad to France, Germany, Turkey, and England to advance their studies.[93]

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[91] Modern education began in 1863 under Syed Jamaluddin in the era of Amir Sher Ali Khan. Prior to that, the only form of education available was *madrassas* (Islamic schools), which were taught by mullah (Islamic teachers).

[92] Mir H. Sadat, "History of education in Afghanistan," *Reliefweb*, March 1, 2004, http://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/history-education-afghanistan.

[93] Imtiyaz Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan," *Criterion Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (June, 2012), http://www.criterion-quarterly.com/modern-education-system-in-afghanistan/.

Initially, admittance to the Afghan universities was often restricted to members of the aristocracy and other government officials.[94] As time progressed, however, non-aristocratic students gained more access and education became more accessible to the general population.[95]

By 1950, the Afghan government had made tremendous advancements in expanding access and improving the quality of higher education.[96] Systematic planning of education began in 1956 and was referred to as the first five-year educational-development plan (1956–1961), in which the focus was improving primary education. As the need for human resources increased, the Afghan government initiated the second five-year plan (1962–1967), which focused on technical and higher education. From 1964 onward, education from the primary to university level was free and funded by the Afghan government.[97] Free tuition greatly expanded access, and more than "20 percent of the students received free books, stipends and other school materials."[98] More importantly, "education opportunities were made available to all, irrespective of gender, race, religion, or social class."[99]

In 1963, the Afghan government established a second public institution, Nangarhar University. Both Pashto and English were the languages of instruction. The third university, Polytechnical University, was created in 1969 with Soviet assistance and included three faculties: construction, electro-mechanics, and geology. By the late 1960s, Afghan professors and academics developed more than 350 textbooks and teaching materials.[100] The following decade, many more universities were established, with international help from

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94 Sadat, "History of education in Afghanistan."

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan."

98 Mohammad Ali, *Progressive Afghanistan* (Lahore: Punjab Electric Press, 1933), 186.

99 Gul, "Modern Education," 87.

100 Saif R. Samady, "Education and Afghan Society in the twentieth century," *UNESCO* (Paris: UNESCO, 2001), 61–62, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001246/124627e.pdf.

universities in France, Germany, and America, including Columbia University, Indiana University, University of Wyoming, and the University of Nebraska.[101] Consequently, from 1956 to 1972, student enrollment ballooned from 760 to 6,600 at both Kabul and Polytechnical universities.[102] Educational institutions were gradually increasing in number and were embraced by the majority of Afghans until the government's dramatic political shift to Communism in the 1970s.

While the Afghan government continued to expand the university system, popular discontent was brewing among the Afghan people, especially the youth. Many high-school students in urban areas were being turned away because of the government's inability to absorb them into the university system. University graduates fared no better, because of the grim employment prospects after graduation. By 1973, more than 20,000 high-school students graduated per year, but less than half could gain admission to universities or post-secondary schools.[103] This was in part because of "faulty planning and structural inadequacies."[104] In Kabul University, more than 12,000 high school graduates competed for about 3,000 slots. To curb pressure on the educational system, the Afghan government implemented the French-derived Concord examination.[105] The new implementation of the Concord exam did not address the problem of an influx of students applying to universities, however.

In 1973, Daoud Khan, King Zahir Shah's brother-in-law, led a bloodless coup d'etat against the monarchy in response to student unrest and resentment among the educated class over unemployment. Daoud Khan deposed the monarchy, abolished the constitution of 1964, and installed himself as president and foreign minister. After his announcement of a policy of nonalignment (in

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101 Ibid.

102 Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan."

103 Ibid., 82.

104 M. M. Shorish, "Eslām wa mellīgarāʾī dar kotob-e darsī-e Afḡānestān," *Rošd-e moʿallem* (Tehran, 1986): 24–28, 61–62.

105 The exam is still required today in order to gain entry into an Afghan university.

keeping with Afghan tradition), relations with the neighboring Soviet Union began to strain, and Daoud Khan pursued a campaign against Afghan communists. The assassination of a leading Afghan Communist Party leader in early April 1978 motivated communists in the government to launch a campaign against the Daoud regime.

B. INCREASED SOVIET INFLUENCE

In May 1978, Daoud Khan was ousted by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), led by Nur Muhammad Taraki. In December 1978, Taraki signed a 20-year "friendship treaty" with the Soviet Union, which dramatically increased Soviet assistance to Afghanistan. Taraki also implemented radical Marxist-style reforms, including land reforms, and increased women's rights.[106] His drastic changes, to education in particular, completely alienated traditional segments of Afghan society. Afghans who were initially willing to let their kids attend university eventually began pulling them out as Taraki called for increased liberalization that ran counter to deep cultural and religious practices.[107] Despite pushback from conservative and traditional Afghans, Taraki pressed the Soviet model of education, which focused on secularism and Marxist philosophy. By the mid-1970s, "Soviet educational ideologies permeated Afghan institutions."[108] Resentment and opposition to the Afghan government by the majority Afghan population reached a boiling point before the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979.[109]

1. Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan (1979)

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the decade-long war that ensued significantly disrupted learning at the university level. Universities

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106 Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan."

107 Ibid.

108 Adele Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 1 (Spring, 2009): 114.

109 Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan."

accused of siding with the insurgency or with the Soviets were targeted both by mujahdaeen factions (freedom fighters who were anti-Communist and pro-Islamist) and Soviet forces. As the battle raged on, by 1984, overall enrollment dropped by more than 300,000—from one million to 700,000.[110] Despite the continuous fighting and high dropout rates, the Afghan government continued to pursue the previous policy of imparting free education and did manage to keep the prominent universities intact. Under President Babrak Karmal, literacy courses and health and technology programs remained and the "Russian language replaced English as the international language."[111]

During Soviet rule, new universities were also established. President Muhammad Najibullah, who became the country's fifth president in 1986, opened three new universities in Balkh, (1986), Herat (1988), and Kandahar (1991). Although the universities were open, the quality of learning was suspect. Student-to-teacher ratios varied widely, and the Soviet-influenced curricula, mixing of three age groups into single classes, and lack of protection against mujahedeen attacks all created problems.[112] Because the Soviets had direct control over university curricula, significant changes were introduced in the social sciences, theology, economics, and law.[113] By the early 1980s, the university curriculum emulated Soviet pedagogy completely. Initially, the curriculum was a mix of the old Afghan curriculum and Russian textbooks; however, the curricula began to emphasize "communist internationalism" as a means of promulgating communist ideology among the younger generation. New subjects including "historical materialism, the revolutionary history of workers, [the] history of Russia, [and] Spain" were introduced and any Islamic courses discussing jihad were omitted entirely.[114] By 1983, more than 20,000 Afghan students were

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[110] Ibid.

[111] Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 115.

[112] Sadat, "History of education in Afghanistan."

[113] Ibid.

[114] Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan," 92.

forcibly sent to the USSR annually for vocational training and education.[115] Soviet instructors and Eastern-bloc specialists replaced Afghan professors, who fled the country by the thousands or were executed if they defied the Soviet style of education. The Afghanistan Education Committee (AEC), an NGO for refugees established in Peshawar in 1983, accused the Soviets of "Russian colonialism and exploitation" through the Afghan curricula. According to AEC:

> Afghan teachers are forced to teach the students in such a way…against their culture and belief…. They introduce several new subjects of communism and socialism in various faculties and schools. They, directly, or indirectly, have been forced to learn Russian languages. Every day teachers should say in classes something in favor of Russian friendship with Afghanistan.[116]

By 1988, near the end of the war, more than 31,019 Afghan teachers and professors from all educational levels had either fled the country or been executed.[117]

2. The Afghan Civil War (1992–1996)

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, the Afghan government transferred power to the Islamic Jihad Council (IJC), in 1992. Mujahadeen factions, including the Northern Alliance (Jamiat-e-Islami), Hezb-e-Islami, Hezb-e-Wahdat and Hezb-e-Jumbesh were unable to find common ground, however, and rival warlords plunged the country into civil war. The universities initially remained open, but as warring mujahadeen factions frequently targeted university buildings, schools began closing. Furniture, materials, and electric wiring were ransacked from the universities. Libraries were looted and many textbooks that were considered "Soviet influenced" were burned or discarded.[118].

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115 Ed Girardet, *Afghanistan, The Soviet War* (Routledge: Reissue, 2012), 147.

116 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 115.

117 Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan."

118 Ibid.

The universities that remained were morphed by mujahedeen groups into "factional education departments," with various degrees of Islamic religiosity. While some mujahedeen leaders, including Ahmad Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani, endorsed a more moderate version of Islam, others, including Abdul Rasoul Sayaf and Gulbuddin Hikmatyar, subscribed to a hardline version of Salafi or Wahabi Islam.[119] The latter group received tremendous funding from oil- rich states such as Saudi Arabia and was therefore able to exert more influence over higher education. For instance, the "language of jihad was incorporated throughout the curriculum," social-science textbooks began to emphasize Saudi/Muslim history, and math books included questions such as, "one year a group of mujahedeen spent 124,800 Afghanis. What was their monthly expenditure?"[120]

By 1993, much of the Soviet-influenced curricula that had previously been used was replaced with Islamized versions. Many of the higher education institutes that were based in Peshawar during the Soviet war were later transferred to Afghanistan. The Islamic University was established in Peshawar by Hikmatyar's Hezb-e-Islami in 1989 and later transferred to Afghanistan's Khost province. It initially had faculties of education and medicine, but later offered degrees in engineering, agriculture, literature and Sharia. In 2003, it became Khost University and continues to exist under the same name.[121] Another college initially located in Peshawar was Abdullah Bin Masoud

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[119] Salafism and Wahhabism are more rigid versions of Islam that adhere to the literal interpretation and legalistic reading of the Qur'an and Hadith. They reject other valid legal methods such as consensus (Ijma'a), analogy (Qiyas), or personal judgment and independent reasoning (Ijtihaad). Abdullah Saeed and Hassan Saeed, *Freedom of Religion, Apostasy, and Islam* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 88.

[120] Other select U.S. funded 6–8 math textbooks include: "6 rockets, 8 mujahadeen, 5 pens, 8 books, 7 guns," "One commander wanted to divide his 10 mujahadeen into 3 groups. The ratio was 2:2:1. How many are there in each group?" Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 112–114; Emma Graham-Harrison, "Saudi Arabia funding $100m Kabul mosque and education centre," *The Guardian*, November 2, 2012, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/02/saudi-arabia-funding-kabul-mosque.

[121] Misbah Abdulhaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan," *Policy Perspectives* 6, no. 2 (July-December, 2009), http://www.ips.org.pk/pakistan-and-its-neighbours/1081-higher-education-in-afghanistan.html#_ftn3.

University. It was established by Rabbani's Jamiat-e-Islami in 1991 and included a faculty in Sharia. Relocated to the Takhar province of Afghanistan, it continues to operate as Takhar University and has expanded its faculties to permit degrees in medicine, law, science, education, and computer science.[122]

3. Taliban Rule (1996–2001)

The civil war raged on until 1996, when the Taliban seized control of Kabul. The Taliban, meaning "students" in Arabic, emerged subsequent to the Soviet war as hundreds of thousands of Afghans fled Afghanistan to Peshawar in northwest Pakistan. The only form of education available was the hardline madrassas funded by Pakistani intelligence (Inter-Services Intelligence or ISI), Saudi Arabia, and the United States (by proxy).[123] The Taliban, therefore, "were completely entrenched in a belief system that derided democracy and freedom in favor of strict, seventh-century fundamentalist Islam."[124] Despite their rigid views, the Afghan people initially embraced them because they were exhausted from two decades of war and instability. The Taliban were especially welcome in Pashtun-dominated areas, because "their belief system was in basic alignment with already existing tribal customs."[125]

Taliban rule (1996–2001) only worsened the state of higher education in Afghanistan. Fourteen universities were functioning when the Taliban usurped power; that number was reduced to seven during Taliban rule.[126] The universities that managed to remain were Kabul, the Polytechnical Institute, Medical University Kabul, Herat, Nangarhar, Kandahar, and the Academy of Islamic Disciplines and Technology, with campuses in Herat and Jalalabad. Universities

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122 Ibid.

123 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 115–117.

124 Alicia Galea, "No Freedom for Afghan Women: The Taliban Hides Behind Religion to Control Its People," *University of Detroit Law Review* 78, no. 2 (2001): 78, 341.

125 Hamed Madani, *Afghanistan* (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 2004), 34.

126 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 116.

considered to be communist-leaning were burned down.[127] No percentage of the national budget was allocated to higher education, considering the continuous civil war had constrained the economy. This led to a depletion of educational facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and other resources.[128] Much of the general curriculum was abandoned as students were forced to memorize the Quran and concentrate solely on Islamic studies.[129] Women were barred from attending school. Given the dearth of university teachers in classrooms, students began dropping out in high numbers.[130] According to some reports, university student enrollment fell to less than 5,000 during Taliban rule.[131] For those students who remained, the lack of facilities, libraries, and other resources severely inhibited learning. Students who protested the horrible conditions at school might be brutally assaulted by Taliban members.[132] When students at Jalalabad University protested against conditions at the school, Taliban officials opened fire on them.[133] Hazaras, in particular, faced brutal persecution by the Taliban "including a series of mass killings in northern Afghanistan, where thousands of Hazaras lost their lives or were forced to flee their homes."[134] As a consequence, the majority of Hazaras joined with the Northern Alliance that opposed the Taliban. Shia religiosity also increased in response to Taliban enforcement of Sunni practices.[135]

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127 Jeaniene Spink, "Education and Politics in Afghanistan: the importance of an education system in peace building and reconstruction," *Journal of Peace Education* 2, no. 2 (2005): 205.

128 Ibid., 235–246.

129 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 117.

130 Spink, "Education and Politics in Afghanistan," 245.

131 Abdulhaq, "Higher Education in Afghanistan," 3–4.

132 Ibid., 19.

133 Ibid., 3.

134 "World Directory of Minorities," *Minority Rights Group International,* accessed May 22, 2014, http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=5440&tmpl=printpage.

135 Ibid.

C. POST-2001 GIROA

By the fall of the Taliban in 2001 under the U.S. allied and anti-Taliban Northern Alliance forces, more than 80 percent of Afghanistan's universities and schools had been devastated or destroyed. The UN-sponsored Bonn conference in 2001 attempted to pave the way for reconstruction that "included the adoption of a new constitution, a presidential election in 2004, and the National Assembly election in 2005."[136] Hamid Karzai became the new democratically elected president of Afghanistan in 2004 and vowed to bring stability and restore education for both boys and girls.[137]

1. Burgeoning Youth Programs

By 2005, the Afghan government initiated many youth-based programs to address the needs of the vulnerable demographic. The MOHE, in collaboration with UNESCO and the World Bank, initiated a five-year national higher-education strategic plan, which sought to rectify problems and address challenges after nearly three decades of neglect.[138] The Afghan government also established the Afghan Ministry of Youth Affairs (AMYA) within the Ministry of Information and Culture, and tasked it to coordinate youth-oriented programs. To complement AMYA, in 2007, the Afghan government, in collaboration with UN agencies, launched the National Joint Youth Program (NJYP) as a means of:

> …strengthening the capacity of the Government to respond to the needs of the youth of the country, promoting non-formal education, increasing awareness and developing skills (literacy, leadership, strategic planning, conflict resolution, peace-building, etc.) in young people so as to provide better quality of life and livelihood opportunities, engaging youth in governance, development and

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136 C.P.S. Chauhan, "Higher Education: Current Status and Future Possibilities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives. Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka," *Analytical Reports in International Education* 2, no. 1 (March, 2008): 5, http://aried.info/00ISSUES/BACK/2008/0201-March2008/PDF/Ch2-Chauhan-29–48.pdf.

137 Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan."

138 "Growth in number of Afghan high school graduates strains country's university system," *UNAMA*, August 15, 2013, http://unama.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?ctl=Details&tabid=12254&mid=15756&ItemID=37161.

> social-political processes at local, district, municipal, provincial and national level, ensuring the participation of young women and men in democracy and advocacy and promoting volunteerism for peace and development and establishing a youth volunteer corps for Afghanistan.[139]

NJYP lasted until 2009 and was later replaced by the Afghan National Youth Policy (ANYP), which was presented to President Karzai in May 2013. ANYP is a programmatic document that includes feedback from more than 500 Afghan youth. The policy outlined legislative strategies "to systematically address, short, medium, and long-term youth issues."[140] The priority target groups for ANYP include, but are not limited to, young women and girls, unemployed and underemployed youth, rural youth, extremist youth, marginalized youth, and youth with no access to education.[141] The results of ANYP have yet to be seen, as it has only been recently implemented. But as far as higher education is concerned, the Afghan government has made some progress.

2. Increased Enrollment and Public Universities

By 2009, 22 universities received more than $35 million in aid, averaging $1.5 million per university.[142] The primary goals for MOHE were to improve the "standard of education provision of required facilities in educational institutes, capacity building, taking measures to maintain the standard, and efforts to reform the syllabus."[143] Other objectives included creating a total of 34 institutions in the

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139 "Afghanistan's Future in Transition: A Participatory Assessment of Afghan Youth," *Samuel Hall Consulting,* 2013, 17, http://samuelhall.org/REPORTS/Future%20in%20Transition:%20A%20Participatory%20Assessment%20of%20the%20Afghan%20Youth.pdf.

140 Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Information and Culture, (MIC) *Draft: Afghanistan National Youth Policy Report* (Kabul: Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, MIC, 2013), http://apyouthnet.ilo.org/resources/draft-afghanistan-national-youth-policy/at_download/file1.

141 Ibid., 10.

142 Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Ministry of Higher Education, *National Higher Education Strategic Plan: 2010–2014* (Afghanistan: Government Printing Office, 2009), 3, http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_HESP_2010–2014.pdf.

143 Ibid., 3–4.

capital cities of the 34 provinces, to offer two years of technical and professional education; increasing the number of professors holding PhDs to 20 percent and master's degrees to 50 per cent by 2016; and promoting information-technology centers in all the universities.[144] As of August 2012, "there were more than 91 higher institutes, of which 31 were public (17 universities and 14 higher education institutes) and 70 were private higher educational institutes."[145] Such ambitious accomplishments have attracted many students, and university applications have increased at staggering rates. From 2001 to 2012, enrollment expanded from 8,000 students to 100,000 in public universities and institutes of higher learning.[146] The number of high-school graduates is expected to grow more than three times, from approximately 75,000 in 2008 to more than 230,000 in 2014.[147] Of those graduates, more than a fifth are female.

3. Attempts to Revise Curricula

In early 2003, the interim government's ministry of education, in collaboration with USAID, UNICEF, and UNESCO, created a draft of the university curriculum that reflected the country's new emphasis on "social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, [and] the realization of democracy."[148] *Curriculum Framework Afghanistan* (2003) also emphasized that implementing the new curriculum would mean Afghan youth would be "good Muslims, civilized human beings and true, self-reliant Afghans."[149] Despite promises to establish a new curriculum that reflected the aforementioned ideas, USAID and other NGOs

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144 Only about 5 percent of their faculty members have Ph.D and just over a third have master's degrees, while there are only two authorized doctoral programs in the entire country, according to the ministry; Abdulbaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan."

145 Gul, "Modern Education System in Afghanistan."

146 "Staff Development Results in Better Teaching Methods at Balkh University," *World Bank*, October 28, 2013, http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/28/staff-development-results-in-better-teaching-methods-at-balkh-university.

147 Ibid.,79.

148 The Constitution of Afghanistan, Article 6.

149 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 116.

> …simply re-printed old textbooks from the 1980s created at the Center for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (with the help of the CIA) that couched math problems in terms of killing Soviets, contained numerous pictures of guns and bullets, detailed the history of Saudi Arabia not Afghanistan, and read more like a jihadist manual than a children's school textbook.[150]

University curriculums were also reprinted and contained extremely outdated content—especially in the fields of medicine, engineering, and technology—that was unresponsive to labor-market needs and future employment for graduates.[151]

In 2011, the MoHE "appointed a committee of university professors and other stakeholders to review the curriculum and produce a guidebook to change the curriculum based on labour market needs."[152] The MoHE invited Afghan and international scholars to participate in month-long seminars to develop university curriculums that would meet international standards and enable students to compete in the market economy. The new curriculums were also supposed to be sensitive to Afghan "religio-cultural and social values."[153] The Afghan university curriculum has yet to be updated, due primarily to the unavailability of textbooks in the native Dari and Pashto languages combined with "teachers who do not have the ability to consult the books published in other languages."[154]

D. CONCLUSION

Afghanistan has endured more than three decades of war, and the universities have borne the brunt by being at the center of disputes among

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150 Ann Jones, *Kabul in Winter: Life Without Peace in Afghanistan* (Picador: First Edition, 2007), 256–259.

151 "High university enrolment, low graduate employment: Analyzing the paradox in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka," *The Economist* (January 2014): 18–19, http://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/britishcouncil.in2/files/british_council_report_2014_jan.pdf.

152 Abdulbaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan."

153 Ibid., 8–9.

154 Abdulbaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan."

political groups. Improving the educational system in Afghanistan will not miraculously happen overnight. Afghan youth have been the pawns of government regimes that have tried to impose their ideology onto the group. Islam has always been a way of life for Afghans, and when they feel their religion or culture is coming under attack, they will defend it to the core.[155] Despite Soviet attempts in the 1970s to influence Afghan youth through the educational system, Afghans united against the "Soviet style" teaching that went against the mores of their society, Although youth are currently going back to school at staggering rates, there remains a historical distrust of the government because it is perceived as propagating a particular ideology. The goal of the Afghan government should be to provide quality higher education that provides youth with the necessarily skills to compete in the job market. The focus should not be to tout a specific ideology, especially if goes against Afghan cultural and religious beliefs.

Although the MoHE has made significant advancements in higher education after 2001, many challenges remain for the government. Not only must the educational system avoid promoting an ideology that offends cultural and religious beliefs, but the government must also recognize that providing access to education at a broad level requires a coherent strategy. Afghan history demonstrates that being unable to absorb increased student enrollment and turning out university graduates with limited skills poses significant problems to the political system. Afghan youth may become disillusioned with grim employment prospects after graduation and induce instability. Given the current youth bulge in Afghanistan, the government must provide high-quality education that allows youth to compete in the job market.

155 "Religious Influences: Culture of Islam," *University of West Florida*, 2010, http://uwf.edu/atcdev/afghanistan/Religious/Lesson2CultureOfIslam.html.

III. THE U.S. IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFGHANISTAN

This chapter provides a brief examination of U.S.–Afghan relations since the 1960s and their implications for the higher-education system. Of particular significance are U.S. support of Islamic education as a foreign-policy tool to deter Soviet influence in the region. The United States has historically "cast Islam as a pedagogical vehicle to inspire and mobilize resistance during times of war, or Islam as the sword."[156] Presently, many U.S.-funded educational initiatives in Afghanistan seek to reduce Islamic extremism through curricula, which is based within an Islamic context. Essentially, the United States wants to blend Western values with Islam to stimulate economic development and social change along free-market-friendly lines. The problem is that the United States has focused primarily on improving education at the primary and secondary levels and this is a problem because college aged youth are the ones seeking future opportunities. Although the U.S. has invested significantly in American University of Afghanistan (AUAf), it has for the most part neglected public universities, which are in dire need of assistance. The U.S. failure to focus on Afghan youth at public universities can potentially exacerbate the youth bulge problem in the country.

A. U.S. AND AFGHAN RELATIONS BEFORE 2001

Among South Asian countries, Afghanistan has the longest-standing diplomatic relations with the United States. The United States recognized Afghanistan in 1921 and established diplomatic relations in 1935. While U.S. interests in Afghanistan were initially limited, Kabul acquired strategic importance beginning in World War II. The United States' policy in Afghanistan was consistent through the Cold War: to counter "excessive Soviet influence" in the country and maintain a power balance. The focal point was not necessarily

156 Roozbeh Shirazi, "Islamic Education in Afghanistan: Revisiting the United States' Role," *The New Centennial Review* 8, no. 1 (Spring, 2008): 215.

Afghanistan itself, but more so the surrounding areas, such as the ports of the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, that were deemed critical.[157]

From the 1950s to 1979, the United States provided significant financial assistance to Afghanistan, giving more than "$500 million in loans, grants, and surplus agricultural commodities to develop transportation facilities, increase agricultural production, expand the educational system, stimulate industry, and improve government administration."[158] Basically, the United States used development assistance as a means of promoting ideological objectives. Before the Soviet war, a team of Columbia University professors collaborated with the MoE for more than two decades to reform and "modernize" the education system in Afghanistan by focusing on curriculum development and teacher training.[159] More importantly, the Columbia team attempted to incorporate Islam into the curricula, but also to infuse them with Western concepts. Other American universities, including the universities of Wyoming and Nebraska, also became involved in partnerships in Afghanistan.

B. THE SOVIET INTERLUDE IN AFGHANISTAN

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 resulted in a deterioration in U.S.–Afghan relations. While the U.S. terminated any sort of bilateral assistance, it heavily financed mujahedeen groups stationed in the Pakistani border on the Durand Line.[160] Pakistan's state security service, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), served as the CIA's primary conduit for funding these groups. To counter Soviet influence in the country, the U.S. spent millions of dollars to create

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157 Steve Galster, "Volume II: Afghanistan: Lessons from the Last War," *The National Security Archive*, October 9, 2001, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB57/essay.html.

158 U.S. Department of State, *U.S. Relations with Afghanistan*, (Washington, 2013), http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5380.htm#relations.

159 Shirazi, "Islamic Education in Afghanistan," 215.

160 After Pakistan's inception in 1947, the Durand Line is the internationally recognized border between Afghanistan and Pakistan that was formulated by the British in 1893. Afghanistan has historically refused to recognize the 1893 Durand Line Agreement and this has resulted in skirmishes between the two countries.

schoolbooks that were filled with "violent images and militant Islamic teaching."[161] From 1986 to 1992, USAID oversaw a $50-million contract with the Education Center for Afghanistan (ECA) that produced textbooks "that were polemical and fiercely critical of the Soviet Union and promoted Islam through violence."[162] At primary and secondary schools, texts instructed children that, "alef is for Allah, jim is for jihad, and shin is for Shakir, who conducts jihad with his sword."[163] Jihad essentially became entrenched within the curricula.

The three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan who attended U.S.-funded madrassas were also inculcated with hardline Islamic teachings, and many of these madrassas were accused of serving as "incubators for violent extremism."[164] Between 1986 and 1989, U.S. aid increased to more than $600 million annually, which was matched by Saudi contributions.[165] In 1981, the United States pressed other countries to help with the refugee cause. The United States' decision to get other countries involved because if refugee financing became too transparent, it "would damage the credibility of the muja[hadeen] by focusing attention on U.S. influence in the Afghan insurgency."[166] Numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) agreed to assist refugees as long as they were given the proper resources to do so. The United States financed only those NGOs that it favored and encouraged other countries to either fund the same or to contribute to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).[167] Ultimately, most aid went to mujahedeen factions, providing these groups "with significant political leverage over the millions of Afghan exiles."[168]

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161 Joe Stephens and David B. Ottaway, "From U.S., the ABC's of Jihad; Violent Soviet-Era Textbooks Complicate Afghan Education Efforts," *The Washington Post*, March 23, 2002.

162 Shirazi, "Islamic Education in Afghanistan," 221.

163 Ibid., 224.

164 "9/11 Commission Report," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 22, 2004, http://www.cfr.org/911-impact/911-commission-report/p10353.

165 Shirazi, "Islamic Education in Afghanistan," 221.

166 Galster, "Volume II: Afghanistan: Lessons from the Last War."

167 Ibid.

168 Ibid.

Many dislocated Afghan youth, therefore, grew indoctrinated with Islamic extremism and a culture of war.

After the Soviets were expelled from Afghanistan in 1989, U.S. interest in the region plummeted. In the 1990s and during the Clinton administration, the U.S. paid little attention to the country as it plunged into civil war. The tragedy of September 11 brought Afghanistan back into the U.S. spotlight. By the end of 2001, the United States and the international community formed a military coalition to dismantle al-Qaida and its safe havens by ousting the Taliban from power. Also in response to the attacks, the Bush Administration declared a war on terrorism, accompanied by a policy of "winning the hearts and minds of the Muslim world" through humanitarian assistance.[169]

C. U.S.–AFGHAN RELATIONS AFTER 2001

After the fall of the Taliban, U.S. aid organizations including UNESCO and USAID quickly began to reconstruct the education system in Afghanistan. In February 2002, women were allowed once again to enroll in university after six years of forbiddance during the Taliban era. With UNESCO assistance, more than 1,000 female students took the Concord exam to gain admittance to a university.[170] USAID also greatly contributed to improving the university education system and "obligated millions in construction projects for dormitories and teacher training."[171] As a result, enrollment increased from a reported 4,000 students in 2001 to 37,000 by 2004.[172]

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169 Shirazi, "Islamic Education in Afghanistan," 230.

170 Chauhan, "Higher Education: Current Status."

171 Josh Boak, "Afghan universities struggle for funding," *Washington Post*, February 13, 2011, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2011/02/12/AR2011021203545.html.

172 World Bank, *Report No. ICR00002859* (South Asia: World Bank, 2013), 1, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2014/01/09/000461832_20140109125718/Rendered/PDF/ICR28590P089040IC0disclosed01070140.pdf.

By the end of 2002, numerous U.S. aid organizations, including USAID, UNESCO, and UNICEF, sought to draft a "new curricular framework" that incorporated Western-influenced ideals of "national unity, human rights, and democracy."[173] Through consultation with the interim government's MoE, the *2003 Curriculum Framework Afghanistan* was established, emphasizing that "when young people enter the world of work, as a result of the implementation of the new curriculum, they will be good Muslims, civilized human beings and true, self-reliant Afghans."[174]

There were, however, significant problems related to the curricula at the primary and secondary level. USAID merely reprinted textbooks used during the 1980s and 1990, which focused on themes of "jihad and violent struggle against external enemy forces."[175] More than 15 million copies made their way into Afghanistan.[176] The reprinting of jihadi entrenched curricula demonstrates that it is not just education that matters, but also the type of education. Islamic education comes in various forms and the focus on books from the Afghan Soviet war is highly problematic and needs to be altered.

D. TODAY

The new Afghan curricula now used in primary and secondary schools have been revised to introduce conflict resolution and peace-building ideas within an Islamic context. Moreover, in primary and secondary schools, much of the social-science curricula focuses on "self-determination, political pluralism, and

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173 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 116.

174 Until the 20th century, "all education in Afghanistan was traditional Islamic education, firmly rooted in the Quran and most limited to the study of religious science, and the hadith."[174] While Soviets greatly influenced the Afghan curricula in the 1970s and 1980s and propagated liberal beliefs, the majority of Afghans retained their Islamic identity. It was the Afghan desire to preserve their religion that ultimately resulted in the creation of the *mujahedeen* groups. Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 116; MOE 2003, 11.

175 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 119.

176 Shirazi, "Islamic Education in Afghanistan," 230.

individual rights."[177] The emphasis is also more on competition rather than broad social cooperation. Although Islamic precepts focus on "communal solidarity, social justice, faith and cultural pluralism," the goal has been to converge Western and Islamic values in the curricula.[178] The textbooks amalgamate two disparate approaches to peace and conflict in that "while the strongest Western approach to conflict resolution is to conceptualize and solve problems, the Islamic approach emphasizes the mending and maintenance of social relationships."[179] Although the United States has made attempts to converge Islamic and Western values to inculcate a new generation of Afghans, the reality is that they do not always blend comfortably. In May 2012, more than 200 male students held protests at Kabul University in response to proposed legislation that would criminalize violence against women. The law would have included a ban on child and forced marriage, made domestic violence a crime, and stated rape victims could not be prosecuted for adultery. It would also have outlawed *ba'ad,* a traditional practice of exchanging women or girls to settle disputes or debts.[180] Male students protested and argued that the decree was being "imposed by foreigners" and broke Islamic Shariah law.[181] The bill was eventually rejected after fierce opposition from conservative lawmakers. Such an incident demonstrates that Islamic or cultural values often supersede perceived Western ideas.

At the university level, the United States has focused on public universities only at the margins. Instead, it has focused on the American University of Afghanistan (AUAf), established in 2004. AUAf is a nonprofit, non-sectarian institution that emphasizes a liberalized style of education and, unlike public

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[177] Adele Jones, "Muslim and Western Influences on School Curriculum in Post-War Afghanistan," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 27, no.1 (March, 2007): 28.

[178] Ibid., 28.

[179] Ibid., 29.

[180] Ibid., 9.

[181] Kay Johnson and Rahim Faiez, "Afghan Students Protest Women's Decree," *AP,* May 22, 2013, http://bigstory.ap.org/article/afghan-students-protest-womens-rights-decree.

universities, allows "free inquiry and reasoned argument."[182] A mostly American faculty teaches undergraduate-degree programs in liberal arts as well as market-driven fields such as business administration and information technology. AUAf recently initiated the university's first Western-style MBA program in Afghanistan. The curriculum at AUAf is not predetermined. This is the opposite of public universities, which enroll students into "'faculties,' each with a highly specialized course of study that leads from the beginning to a predetermined professional degree"[183] The university has produced more than eleven Fulbright scholars and has maintained partnerships with institutions such as Stanford Law School Georgetown University, University of California, and Thunderbird School of International Management to train Afghan youth in various fields.[184] In 2014, AUAf was awarded a grant to launch the Kabul Business Accelerator, with the aim of supporting Afghan businesses in marketing, business-plan development, product review, and other economic ends.[185]

AUAf has attracted many students because of its updated facilities, qualified teachers, and variety of subjects. Enrollment was initially 50 in 2004 and today there are more than 1,300 full and part-time students (500 in undergraduate degree programs and 800 taking short courses).[186] Tuition at AUAf is $5,500 annually, but more than 70 percent of the students attending receive grants or other forms of financial aid.[187] USAID has provided significant assistance to AUAf by obligating more than $90 million, out of $200 million for

182 Peter Baehr, "An American University in Afghanistan," *The Society Interview* 46, no. 1 (2008): 9–11.

183 Ibid., 9–10.

184 Ibid., 9–10; "American University of Afghanistan Announces New Kabul Business Accelerator," *Reuters*, September 9, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/09/amer-univ-of-afghanistan-idUSnBw095172a+100+BSW20130909.

185 "American University of Afghanistan Announces New Kabul Business Accelerator."

186 Ibid.

187 Boak, "Afghan Universities Struggling for Funding."

higher education, to reform and update its curriculum.[188] Because of USAID funding, faulty salaries are "competitive with those at Western universities" unlike public universities, which pay professors $500 a month.[189]

While AUAf has received significant U.S. attention, there has been little focus on public universities. In 2005, USAID established the Strengthening of Higher Education Project (SHEP), a $40 million attempt to address the needs of public universities in Afghanistan by increasing lab facilities, completing construction of university infrastructure, and revising outdated curricula in twelve SHEP partner universities (Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Kabul Polytechnic, Bamiyan, Khost, Takhar, Jawzjan, Al-Beroni and Kabul Education University). By 2013, the World Bank reported that 97 out of 110 of the faculties in the twelve partner universities claimed to have revised their curricula.[190]

While this was a great step, more than 20 public universities are still in need of revised curricula and upgraded facilities.

E. CONCLUSION

Foreign aid from the United States has been centered more on political strategy rather than sustainable, long-term change, especially with regard to higher education. Although the United States has focused on AUAf, it has largely ignored the needs of public universities, which are presently in crisis. Kabul University, which is a ten-minute drive from AUAf, can barely accommodate its 20,000-student enrollment and continues to have languishing laboratories and facilities. Other public universities face similar problems and challenges that the United States has disregarded. As the United States teaches a new generation of Afghans to embrace democratic ideals at the primary and secondary level, as

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[188] John Bohannon, "Can Afghan Universities Recover from War, Taliban and Neglect?" *Science* 337, no. 6095 (August, 2012): 639–641, http://211.144.68.84:9998/91keshi/Public/File/41/337–6095/pdf/639.full.pdf.

[189] Ibid., 640.

[190] World Bank, *Afghanistan: Strengthening Higher Education Program* (Washington: World Bank, 2014), http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P089040/strengthening-higher-education-program?lang=en.

well as at AUAf, it should not neglect the students enrolled at public universities, who constitute the majority of the student demographic and are most susceptible to becoming radicalized and joining an insurgency.

As public universities continue to face enormous challenges because of lack of funding, the United States needs to reevaluate its aid distribution in higher education. The youth bulge can potentially destabilize Afghanistan, with repercussions for the United States, if the majority of Afghan youth feel their grievances and needs are no being addressed.

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IV. CHALLENGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY

The Afghan government and the United States have made significant advancements in higher education, but there are still many challenges unaddressed. First, the state's inability to absorb high-school students has resulted in the proliferation of private universities. While it is a positive thing that these institutions have absorbed rejected applicants, they are accused of existing to maximize profits and of not really assisting university graduates in obtaining jobs. Second, many university graduates from both public and private universities are not gaining the skills needed to be competitive in the job market because of poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, and unqualified teachers. Hence, unemployment is a big issue amongst Afghan university graduates. Religious radicalization in the universities is also a growing problem, especially in Pashtun-dominated institutes and regions.

Many who feel disillusioned about the university system and cannot find employment in Afghanistan have fled abroad to neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Iran, and India. Many others have attempted to go to Europe, often illegally. The mass exodus of Afghan youth to foreign lands has resulted in a brain drain. For Afghan youth who are unable to attain an education at public or private universities, madrassas remain a final option. Often, these madrassas espouse anti-U.S. sentiments and encourage disillusioned youth to adhere to an extremist version of Islam. Students attending these madrassas often end up joining the insurgency, not only from ideological conviction, but also because the Taliban and other militia groups offer hefty financial incentives.

A. INABILITY TO ABSORB STUDENTS AND PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

Although the rapid rise in the number of students in primary and secondary education is a good thing, it also brings an increase in the pool of students who will demand higher education over the medium to long term. In Afghanistan, about 300,000 high school students graduate each year; yet, they

are competing for 60,000 openings in colleges and vocational and teacher-training programs.[191] In 2002, "the gross enrollment rate (GER) for primary school children was about 40 percent for girls and 86 percent for boys, respectively. By 2010, the GER had increased to 79 percent for girls and 114 percent for boys, respectively."[192] Secondary school enrolment also increased for girls from six percent in 2003 to 30 percent in 2010, and for boys from 17 percent in 2003 to 60 percent in 2010.[193] At present, about 171,000 students take the Concord examination, which concludes secondary education. Around 123,000 students pass, and approximately 51,000 of these students are able to enter public universities, while around 25,000 enter private higher-education institutes.[194]

Before 2007, applicants rejected by the public universities had four options: retake the exam the following year, apply for educational opportunities abroad, attend madrassas that offer degree programs, or give up.[195] The shortfall in public higher-education spots and the growing ranks of unlucky applicants has resulted in a mass expansion of private-education companies. Compared to many other low-income countries, the private sector in Afghanistan has absorbed a relatively large number of students. Private universities and institutes are enrolling more than a third of all students.[196]

As mentioned earlier, there are currently about 70 private institutions providing higher education in the country and about 74,000 students attend

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191 Sean Carberry, "Are Afghanistan's Schools Doing as well as Touted?" *NPR*, October 24, 2013, http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2013/10/24/240482395/are-afghanistans-schools-doing-as-well-as-touted.

192 "Higher Education in Afghanistan: An Emerging Mountainscape," 12–13.

193 Ibid., 12–14.

194 Ibid., 13.

195 While the majority of Afghan parents are not against allowing their teens to attend madrassas, they recognize that religious schools will not properly equip students to obtain jobs after graduation.

196 Nahal Toosi, "Afghans Flock to Colleges, Even as Taliban Loom," *AP,* September 19, 2013, http://bigstory.ap.org/article/afghans-flock-colleges-even-taliban-loom.

them.[197] These private institutions are expected to grow and have been marketing to students vigorously through "banners, billboards, television spots, and radio ads" that promise an "open educational environment, library and well-equipped labs, and debate and thought exchange programs."[198] Among the pioneers was Kardan, which became the first licensed private higher-education institute in Afghanistan.[199] Kardan is now a premiere institute, which more than 6,000 students attending and obtaining degrees in business administration, political science, and economics. Afghan parliament members, deputy ministers, and other politicians have been known to attend classes to complete their education.

Because of the paltry offerings and low standards of public universities, private institutes are considered a better option. According to Ilham Gharji, the chancellor of the private Gawharshad University, professors teaching at public universities often use "lecture notes that their professors inherited from their own professors years back, some as old as 30 years."[200]

The staggering increase of the loosely regulated private-higher-education sector has raised many concerns, however. Many students accuse these institutes of only seeking to maximize profits, with little regard for the quality of education. President Karzai has voiced concern about the intention of these universities, stating:

> In Britain, the United States, India, and elsewhere, private-education standards are very high. The same level of standards can also be achieved in Afghanistan, but unfortunately, right now, [some of] these institutions are only there to earn money. Dear brothers and elders who have opened institutes for personal gain

197 Ibid., Mujib Mashal, "Young Afghans Flock to Higher Education but Jobs Remain Scarce," *Time*, June 28, 2013, http://world.time.com/2013/06/28/young-afghans-flock-to-higher-education-but-jobs-remain-scarce/.

198 Zafar S. Royee, "In Afghanistan, Private Colleges Find Opportunity in an Overburdened System," *Chronicle*, June 26, 2011, http://chronicle.com/article/In-Afghanistan-Private/128042/.

199 Mujib Mashal, "Young Afghans Flock to Higher Education."

200 Ibid.

> and business, please go and earn your money by other means, but don't dupe our children with bogus certificates.[201]

One significant criticism is the courses offered by private universities. Many private universities churn out graduates whose new qualifications are "not in accordance with the market needs."[202] For instance, none of the private universities offer courses in agriculture, which are desperately needed in Afghanistan.[203] And, unlike public universities, these private institutions and their degrees are not accredited by UNESCO or accepted around the world.[204] A recent government audit of private institutions and universities concluded, "that none of the universities assessed met the stipulated criteria for 'excellent.'" Only 14 out of the 70 private universities were deemed "'good,' 42 'satisfactory' with 14 found to be 'weak' and put on a two-month probation."[205]

Many education officials, including the head of the MoHE, Suleiman Soroush, refute such claims. Mr. Soroush argues that while the quality of education in private institutions might not be superior to public universities, it is not worse.[206] Kardan's deputy chancellor, Mahmoud Dastagir, argues that the private sector is in its fledgling stage, and he "believes the institutes will be forced to improve" as market competition increases.[207] While it may take a while for private universities to improve, they are still doling out university graduates who are unable to compete in the competitive job market. This in turn exacerbates the already existing unemployment problem.

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201 Royee, "In Afghanistan, Private Colleges Find Opportunity."

202 Mashal, "Young Afghans Flock to Higher Education."

203 Ibid.

204 Baharustani, "Comprehensive Study of Higher Education in Afghanistan," 8.

205 Mashal, "Young Afghans Flock to Higher Education."

206 Royee, "In Afghanistan, Private Colleges Find Opportunity."

207 Mashal, "Young Afghans Flock to Higher Education."

B. POOR INFRASTRUCTURE

During the past four decades, "higher education became highly politicized, ideologized, and sectarianized. Postsecondary campuses became war zones. The result was that the infrastructure was damaged, looted, or destroyed."[208] Presently, the majority of university facilities are in sorry condition and unsuitable for modern teaching and learning. A large backlog of maintenance and repair exists, both for facilities and equipment. [209]

Many Afghan universities are extremely overcrowded and congested, while others operate in worn-down facilities. For instance, urban-centered universities, including Kabul and Heart, often exceed their classroom capacity. Students in Kabul and Herat Universities have held mass protests at being shut out of the public-university system due to lack of space and appalling facilities. Their primary complaint is that the universities lack even the most basic infrastructure such as bathrooms and dormitories (particularly for female students).[210]

While higher-education institutions in Afghanistan provide libraries, there are limited books, computer labs, transportation options, laboratories, Internet, and parking facilities. The infrastructure for higher education has not recovered, and there is a lack of safe drinking water and reliable electricity. Many of these problems persist because national budget allocation to higher education decreased from $4 million in 2009 to $3.1 million in 2010.[211] USAID has primarily obligated its educational funds at the primary and secondary level and to AUAf. According to Action Aid, an international organization that combats world poverty, the other problem is that between 70 and 80 percent of foreign assistance to Afghanistan has been "phantom aid," meaning that people in dire need of funds

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208 Chauhan, "Higher Education: Current Status and Future Possibilities in Afghanistan," 44.

209 "Higher Education in Afghanistan: An Emerging Mountainscape," 33.

210 "Afghan youth are being neglected," *Watan*, accessed May 11, 2014, http://www.watan-afg.com/new_page_7.htm.

211 Baharustani, "Comprehensive Study of Higher Education in Afghanistan," 16.

never actually receive it, either because the money goes straight to contractor salaries and overhead costs or is used to purchase goods and services from the donor country, regardless of whether cheaper services are available.[212] Professors at Kabul University have lamented the shortage of basic teaching aids such as blackboards, whiteboards, markers, and chalk.[213] Other universities, including Herat and Khost, complain of inadequate computer labs, electricity, safe drinking water, parking facilities, and laboratories. In those labs that exist, the required materials and equipment are generally missing.[214]

C. OUTDATED CURRICULA

Another challenge to the higher-education system is the severely outdated curricula in Afghan universities. The state-mandated curriculum has not been updated in the 20 years since mujahadeen rule. Many public universities would therefore not "qualify as tertiary-level institutions by established international norms and standards."[215] Students are not exposed to up-to-date information regarding science, medicine, engineering, and technology.[216]

As mentioned earlier, the United States has focused primarily on improving the curricula at the primary and secondary level, so that Afghan children no longer learn an extremist version of Islam, not on the tertiary level. Similarly, the Afghan government has embarked on a mission to create a national Islamic-education program for nation-building purposes and to appease religiously conservative Afghans and the Taliban. The general university curricula, however, has been neglected and continues to be outdated, despite promises made by the MoHE and U.S. aid agencies to revise them. The current situation at the universities appears to contradict the claim that university curricula had been updated in twelve partner universities, including Kabul

212 Jones, *Kabul in Winter,* 249.

213 Abdulhaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan," 10–11.

214 Ibid., 10, 14.

215 World Bank, *Report No. ICR00002859*, 1.

216 Royee, "In Afghanistan, Private Colleges Find."

University. In May and June 2013, Kabul University students protested and went on a hunger strike on the university campus for more than three weeks. Their demands were for a revised curriculum, increase in benefits for lecturers, and improvements in facilities and dorms.[217]

Tahmina Amanzai, a former medical student at Kabul University, laments that much of the curriculum does not meet international standards. In her experience, the medical curriculum at Kabul University is extremely outdated and does not provide up-to-date information as far as maternal health is concerned.[218] According to Amanzai:

> Pregnant women are dying preventable deaths during labor because students are not equipped at school with the latest information to perform a C-section for instance. If a woman's cervix is too small, the baby will most likely end up dying because the doctors will try to push the baby out, not knowing that that is not the best course of action.[219]

Disillusioned with the outdated teaching methods and curriculum, Amanzai dropped out of Kabul University and was granted admission to AUAf, where she says she is receiving current information about medicine.[220]

Another problem with the university curricula is the lack of textbooks in the native languages of Afghanistan "for the students and teachers who do not have the ability to consult the books published in other languages."[221] Reading the textbooks requires a mastery of English, which most Afghan Professors and

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217 Haseeb Maoudoodi, "Some lecturers behind Kabul University Protests: Education Minister," *Tolo News*, June 16, 2013, http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/10877-some-lecturers-behind-kabul-university-protests-education-minister; Rafi Sediqi, "Kabul University Students on Hunger Strike for the Sixth Day," *Tolo News*, May 25, 2013, http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/10610-kabul-university-students-on-hunger-strike-for-the-sixth-day.

218 Tahmina Amanzai Facebook Page, accessed May 15, 2014, https://www.facebook.com/tahmina.amanzai?fref=ts.

219 Ibid.

220 Ibid.

221 Abdulhaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan."

university students do not speak. Compounding the problem is that university libraries do not provide a stream of new textbooks for students to access.[222]

D. UNQUALIFIED INSTRUCTORS

Another issue is the dearth of qualified teachers to meet the staggering number of students. According to the MoE, in 2012, more than "80 per cent of the country's 165,000 teachers have not achieved the equivalent of a high-school education or did not complete their post-secondary school studies."[223] Currently in Afghanistan, only about five percent of university staff has Ph.D-level training, and they are found mainly in just three universities: Kabul, Kabul Polytechnic, and Nangarhar.[224] Most universities have either no doctoral staff or just one or two. Another approximately 38 percent of staff have master's-level training. While this is a better picture than at the Ph.D level, it is still inadequate. About 57 percent of university staff members have only bachelor's degrees.

In Kabul, university students, including Hamid Aman, complain of poor teaching: "In schools these days, you will see 70 to 80 students in a class, and the teacher can't teach that many students well," he said.

> So, first you need to change the class size, then the teachers. In rural areas there are students graduating from high school who can't even read or write properly. Then those graduates are teaching the middle school children, so the students aren't learning anything.[225]

Also, instructors lack incentive to improve their teaching skills or acquire more knowledge because they are often working other jobs to compensate for their low salaries at the university. Professors and associate professors make

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222 Ibid.

223 Sean Carberry, "Are Afghanistan's Schools Doing as well as Touted?" *NPR*, October 24, 2013, http://www.npr.org/blogs/parallels/2013/10/24/240482395/are-afghanistans-schools-doing-as-well-as-touted.

224 While Ph.D level training is considered the best form of academic training, it does not guarantee high-quality teaching.

225 Sharon Behn, "Afghanistan Struggles to Educate its Youth," *Voice of America*, August 1, 2008, http://www.voanews.com/content/afghanistan-struggles-to-educate-its-youth/1452844.html.

monthly salaries of 15,000 Afghani ($315) and 13,500 Afghani ($280), respectively. Lecturers usually make 10,500 Afghani ($220).[226]

Journalist-turned-humanitarians Ann Jones and Sarah Chayes, who spent extended periods in Afghanistan assisting reconstruction efforts, complained that English teachers in Afghanistan were also not properly trained and their teaching methods were out of date.[227] Their primary concern, however, was that "larger programs were ignoring cultural norms; forgetting that top-down change strategies have never worked in Afghanistan."[228] Given their history, Afghans remain leery about "outsiders" imposing their beliefs and ideology on youth. Any educational program implemented must be sensitive to cultural and religious norms. Otherwise, Afghans will resist as they have in the past.

E. CORRUPTION

Corruption is another major challenge to higher education in Afghanistan. Based on Transparency International's Corruption-Perceptions Index, Afghanistan ranks fifth in corruption. A 2011 national survey on corruption perceptions, conducted by a coalition of NGOs, indicated that more than 11 percent of Afghans firmly believe rampant corruption exists in the educational sector.[229] Three levels of corruption in Afghanistan, ranging from high-level to the petty and local, were found by the UR Anti-Corruption Resource Center, a Norwegian institution aiding international development strategists in dealing with corruption. Figure 1 describes these levels of corruption.

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226 Abdulhaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan."

227 Baharustani, "Comprehensive Study of Higher Education in Afghanistan," 14–15.

228 Ibid., 14–15.

229 Matthew Hall, "Corruption & Afghanistan's Education Sector," *Civil-Military Fusion Centre*, November 2011, 4; "Corruption in the Education Center," *CHR Michelsen Institute*, 2006, https://www.cimicweb.org/Documents/CFC%20AFG%20Social%20Well-being%20Archive/CFC_Afghanistan_Corruption_and_Education_Nov11.pdf

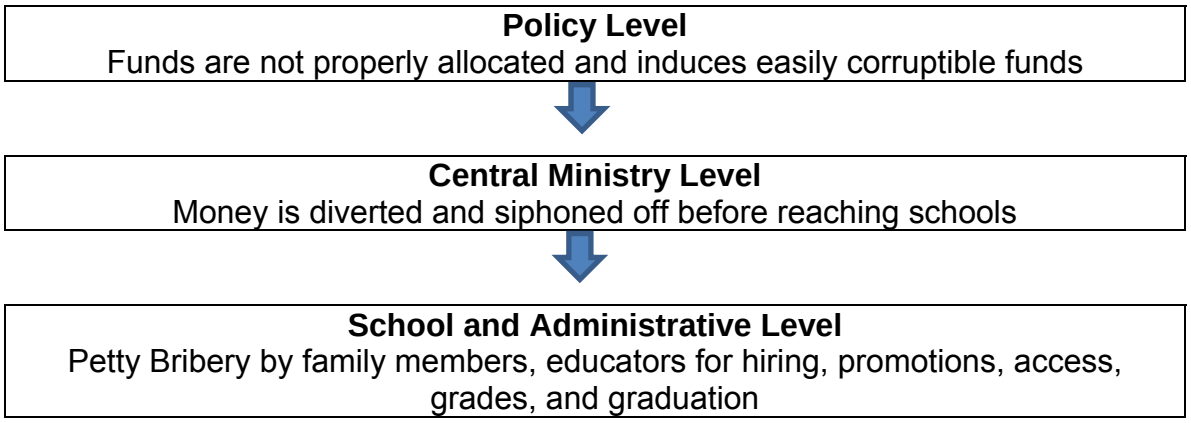

Figure 1. Types of Corruption by Level[230]

There are two main fraudulent practices endemic in the Afghan educational sector. First is the phenomenon of "ghost teachers," where instructors are not present, yet draw a salary.[231] There are reportedly more than 16,000 to 20,000 ghost teachers in Afghanistan.[232] According to a recent study by the Institute for Education and Planning (IIEP), ghost teachers lead to larger class sizes, as there are not enough teachers to go around. As a result, classes are often cancelled, which exacerbates the general distrust of the government. The second problem concerns teacher salaries. IIEP reported that because teachers are paid in cash, money is "'siphoned off' at each step of the distribution process between MoE, provincial offices, district offices, and individual schools."[233] Worsening the situation is the disorder created by dramatically increasing enrollment.

230 Hall, "Corruption & Afghanistan's Education Sector," 2.

231 Hall, "Corruption & Afghanistan's Education Sector," 2–3.

232 Morten Sigsgaard, "Education and Fragility in Afghanistan: A Situational Analysis," UNESCO, 2009, 23, http://www.iiep.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Info_Services_Publications/pdf/2009/Afghanistan.pdf.

233 Ibid., 3–4.

F. RELIGIOUS RADICALIZATION AND INSECURITY

Because Afghanistan is a Muslim-majority country, being a religious Muslim is not a controversial issue. But problems arise when a rigid version of Islam is practiced that condones intolerance and violence. Of concern, therefore, is the growing rate of religious radicalization in Afghan universities. The Soviet war, coupled with "the control of the educational system by Islamist or fundamentalist groups from 1992–2001[,] left a major cultural imprint on the new generation's thinking, even when the majority of the students had no political sympathies for the Islamists or the Taliban."[234] Unlike the 1970s, Islam today dominates student-council groups in Afghan universities. The Masjid Shura (Mosque Council), an Islamic-based student council found throughout university campuses, consists of "a president, two deputies, and a council of 23 members elected through a completely Islamic and democratic election.[235] It focuses on cultural and religious issues and imparts Islamic tenets to students. It has enormous political clout and has been known to intervene in political affairs to defend students. In one instance, several students from Nangarhar University were arrested amid allegations that they were connected to Hezb-e-Islami. The Masjid Shura intervened and held a meeting with the governor of Nangarhar province, who persuaded President Hamid Karzai to release the students. [236]

Access to a university education is now available to all students, from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Tuition is free at public universities, so lower- and middle-class families often enroll. Thus, universities reflect a melting pot of students from various social and ethnic backgrounds. While the majority of Afghan students are not Muslim extremists, decades of rigid Islamic inculcation certainly have had an impact. Unlike the 1970s, when rural parts of Afghanistan were considered culturally conservative and religious and

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234 Anotionio Giustozzi, "Between Patronage and Rebellion: Student Politics in Afghanistan," *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit,* March 26, 2010, 2–5, http://dspace.cigilibrary.org/jspui/handle/123456789/27967.

235 Ibid., 8.

236 Ibid., 13.

urban cities such as Kabul and Herat more liberal and secular, the influx of migration into cities has changed that dynamic. Now, there are a mix of religious and liberal-minded students at the universities, with the ultra-religious sometimes overshadowing the moderates.

The mullahs at the university who have interpreted such reforms to be illegal have been heavily influenced by a more rigid version of Islam stemming from the Middle East, Pakistan, and Iran. These mullahs are often not fluent in the Arabic language and interpret the Quran and Hadith according to their own local, and often patriarchal, traditions. Many of these mullahs dwell at the mosque within the university campuses, where students have direct access to them.[237] Again, mullahs teaching Islam are not problematic so long as they are not condoning violence and propagating intolerance. In many instances, however, it is evident that mullahs are propagating a rigid interpretation of Islam that is comingled with conservative cultural edicts. Often it is Afghan women who bear the brunt.

During Taliban rule, women were barred from receiving an education. Since then, Afghanistan has made significant strides in women's education. However, there still remain tremendous obstacles to female access. Currently, only 19 percent of the students enrolled in higher education institutions are women.[238] Cultural norms, in conjunction with factors such as distance and lack of security, have been key factors in low female enrollment.[239] This paucity of female students means that mullahs are able to declare all sorts of decrees against women, without women present to defend themselves.

Religious students often adhere to the rules postulated by Islamic clerics. President Karzai passed the Shia Family Law in February 2009. The law

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237 Ibid.

238 "Afghan female university enrollment stands at 19%-reveals World Bank's report," *Wadsam*, August 31, 2013, http://www.wadsam.com/afghan-female-university-enrollment-stands-at-19-reveals-world-banks-report-232/.

239 Azizi, "Leaders of Higher Education," 25.

essentially formalized discrimination against Shia women by granting "a husband the right to withdraw basic maintenance from his wife, including food, if she refuses to obey his sexual demands."[240] The law was secretly designed by a prominent, hardline Shia leader, Ayatollah Asif Mohseni. Hundreds of students from various Afghan universities publicly displayed their support for the law. While Afghan women protested in Kabul, Afghan men and women on university campuses did not protest the law.[241] Afghan women who did attend the protests "had to be rescued by police from a hail of stones and abuse."[242]

1. The Taliban, Hizb-e-Islami (HI) and Hezb Ul Tahrir (HuT)

While the Taliban's main recruits have been uneducated, rural Pashtun, since 2006, the Taliban have begun infiltrating the universities. Students coming from Pashtun-dominated regions to study at urban universities are especially vulnerable to Taliban recruitment, because the majority of Taliban fighters are Pashtun. Taliban propaganda has attempted to manipulate student grievances (unemployment and ethnic marginalization) and religious beliefs to gain support for the insurgency.[243] Currently, vocal support for the Taliban stems primarily from Pashtun-dominated universities, including Nangarhar and Jalalabad. Nangarhar University, one of the largest in Afghanistan (3,500 students and 250 faculty), has earned a reputation for active Taliban members. Taliban activists and sympathizers at Nangarhar University are predominantly Pashtun, from provinces including Wardak, Logar, and the southern regions. While the Taliban

240 "Afghanistan: Law Curbing Women's Rights Take Effect," Human Rights Watch, August 14, 2009, http://www.hrw.org/news/2009/08/13/afghanistan-law-curbing-women-s-rights-takes-effect.

241 Ibid.

242 Tom Coghlan, "Women Protestors Against Marital Rape Law Spat and Stoned in Kabul," *CETRI*, April 16, 2009, http://www.cetri.be/spip.php?article1136.

243 Antonio Giustozzi, *Empires of Mud: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan, 2002–2007* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 18.

presence at Kabul University is suspected to be widespread, its secretive nature makes it difficult to pinpoint just how many members are on campus.[244]

Hizb-e-Islami (HI) is also very influential on university campuses, including Nangarhar and Jalalabad. Many of the members have participated in public demonstrations against Americans. Hostels have become the central place for nighttime political gatherings by anti and pro-government student unions. Hostel walls are littered with such slogans as "long live the Taliban," and "long live Hekmatyar."[245]

Hezb Ul Tahrir (HuT) is a neo-Salafist, pan-Islamist, and transnational political organization heavily active in Pashtun-dominated Afghan universities. HuT seeks to reestablish the caliphate and bring all Muslim countries under one state. More importantly, "HuT's ideology is different and more radical than that of Hezb-e Islami, Ustad Sayyaf's Dawat-e Islami (which became Afghanistan's first Salafi mujahedin group in the 1980s) and, even that of the Taliban's insurgent Salafism."[246] HuT could potentially recruit Afghan university students who have experienced decades of Islamist influence and who are disillusioned by ubiquitous corruption, skyrocketing unemployment, and ethnic divisions. Although HuT claims to be all-inclusive, it has openly opposed many Shia rituals.[247]

Herat University has seen little religious activism, but pockets of activity surface nonetheless. The Islamic-law faculty in particular has been associated with relatively high levels of militancy. Also, many HI members attend the

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244 "Afghanistan: Secret Taleban cells spread lessons of jihad in Kabul University," *The Times*, May 27, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article4009843.ece.

245 Gulbuddin Hikmatyar was and continues to serve as the leader of Hizb-e-Islami and is a longtime warlord since the Soviet war in Afghanistan. Mahbood Shah Mahboob, "Hardliners tighten grip on Nangarhar University," *Pajhwok News*, March 8, 2013, http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2013/03/08/hardliners-tighten-grip-nangarhar-university.

246 Abbad Daiyar, "The Growth of Neo-radicalism: Neo-Salafism and Sectarianism," *Afghanistan Analyst Network,* January 25, 2013, http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-growth-of-neo-radicalism-neo-salafism-and-sectarianism.

247 Ibid.

campus. According to some reports, "the legitimacy of suicide bombings is openly discussed in the classrooms."[248] More importantly, secular students have repeatedly voiced feelings of intimidation by the increasingly religious climate at the university.[249]

Considering the enormous rates of university enrollment, the number of students actively involved in "rebellious" activities is relatively low in the post-2001 environment, although some fear its gradual increase.[250] Sympathy for the armed opposition is widespread among Pashtun students and in Pashtun-majority universities. Nangarhar, the only predominantly Pashtun university, is a case in point, but the same processes can be observed to some degree among Pashtun students attending Kabul and Herat universities, which exhibit something of the same pattern.

The majority of Afghan youth are Muslim, but even if they are not religious extremists, they remain loyal to their religion and culture. The government and U.S. aid agencies should therefore attend to cultural and religious norms in the educational system because neglect will lead to a backlash, especially in religiously conservative universities. Implementing a "one-size-fits-all model" has led to occasions in the past where students in various conservative universities, including Takhar and Khost, refused to "use textbooks displaying 'un-Islamic' images such as people drinking alcohol or women in strapless dresses and awkward moments relating to appropriate behavior in mixed-gender setting."[251] Kabul University students, including Abdul Mateen Aziz Yar, a student of engineering, have expressed discontent with the "moral clash" taking place in the university. He conveyed his frustration in the Weekly Bahar:

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248 Giustozzi, "Between Patronage and Rebellion," 12.

249 Ibid., 4.

250 "Higher Education Takes Promising Shape at Nangarhar University," *World Bank,* October 28, 2013, http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/28/higher-education-takes-promising-shape-at-nangarhar-university.

251 Jones, *Kabul in Winter,* 225.

> We can see that rather than emphasizing on teaching, the Kabul University is laying greater stress on promoting moral clash and it is clearly visible that moral clash is increasing day by day in the university. I request the Minister of Higher Education to take such steps as would put a stop to this moral crisis.[252]

Disregarding Afghan mores can backfire as youth—regardless of their religiosity—have historically resisted outside influence they perceive as morally decadent or against their beliefs. Similar to Southeast Asian countries, Afghanistan might embrace capitalism, but not necessarily Western liberal ideals.

2. Insecurity

The Taliban have been targeting universities and schools they accuse of propagating Western culture and anti-Islamic teachings. Amnesty International interviewed a Taliban spokesman who claimed they were closing schools whose "books have been printed in the USA" with the "curriculum…developed by foreigners."[253] The Taliban do not offer a competing curriculum. Instead, they tell parents to send their sons to madrassas in neighboring Pakistan for Islamic studies.[254] Some factions within the Taliban have called for education to be limited to conservative Deobandi or Salafi Islamic education in the madrassas they control.[255] Their primary objective is to close down the schools they consider anti-Islamic or funded by the West. On numerous occasions, the Taliban Leadership Council has issued statements condemning the government-backed schools:

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252 Abdulhaqi, "Higher Education in Afghanistan."

253 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 117.

254 "Afghanistan: Taliban forces students out of schools and into madrassas," *IRIN*, February 15, 2009, http://www.irinnews.org/report/82963/afghanistan-taliban-forces-students-out-of-schools-into-madrasas.

255 Sigsgaard, "Education and Fragility in Afghanistan," 18.

> Present academic curriculum is influenced by the puppet administration and foreign invaders…Use of the curriculum as a mouthpiece of the state will provoke the people against it.[256]

The Taliban have continuously been sending *shabnameh*, "night letters," to school officials in Kandahar, Wardark, Kapisa, and Zabul provinces, threatening reprisals if they did not shut down the schools.[257] The night letters also demanded that Afghans join the jihad refrain from working with foreign organizations and the Afghan government.[258] Between 2004 and 2008, there were 722 attacks against schools educational facilities, staff, and students.[259] Also, between 2006 and 2009, more than 439 instructors and staff were killed.[260] In 2010, violence targeted against students prevented more than five million children and youth from going to school. According to Deputy Minister Siddiq Patman, "there is no day that goes by when a school-related security incident is not reported to the Ministry of Education." As of March 2009, more than 650 schools have been closed down by insurgent attacks or threats, taking the right to education away from around 500,000 children in four southern provinces of Afghanistan.[261]

3. Last Resort: Joining the Insurgency

Youth in rural parts of Afghanistan who cannot gain admittance to a university, find employment, or leave the country, may end up joining the insurgency. Although some join the Taliban out of religious convictions, the majority join because they have no alternative means of providing for their family. While

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256 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 114; Human Rights Watch, 2006, 34.

257 Jones, "Curriculum and Civil Society in Afghanistan," 117.

258 "Lessons in Terror: Attacks on Education in Afghanistan," Human Rights Watch 18, no. 6c (July, 2006), 33, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/afghanistan0706.pdf.

259 Sigsgaard, "Education and Fragility in Afghanistan," 18.

260 "Afghanistan," *Education in Crisis*, accessed May 15, 2014, http://www.educationincrisis.net/country-profiles/asia-pacific/item/551-afghanistan.

261 Susan Wardak and Dr. Michael Hirth, "Defining the Gaps: The Case of Afghanistan," *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education*, April 2009, http://www.afghan-web.com/education/case_afg_education.pdf.

joining the Afghan security forces is possible, many rural youth reject the choice out of fear of retaliation by the Taliban and the dangers involved with the job.[262]

Afghan youth are vital to Taliban military operations because they notify insurgent members of the movements and locations of ISAF soldiers and increase the Taliban's combat capabilities. Afghan youth in rural areas are especially prone to joining the Taliban because they are often the breadwinners of the household. According to a recent survey conducted by the Asia Foundation, most Afghan youth, particularly in rural provinces, are pessimistic about their futures and believe that that government has neglected to address their grievances.[263] Currently, more than 70 percent of Afghan youth living in the country provinces are unemployed.[264] While many have moved to the city for better opportunities, those who remain are forced to assess their options. The temptation to join the Taliban is certainly there considering the Taliban reportedly pay their foot soldiers $300 per month, whereas an Afghan policeman earns $165 per month.[265]

G. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Presently, the estimated graduate unemployment rate in Afghanistan is 65 percent.[266] According to the government, more than 500,000 jobs must be created annually to "stave off increasing unemployment."[267] The problem is that most university graduates have not acquired the skills necessary to be

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262 Hameed Hakimi, "Left behind: the rural youth in Afghanistan's election," *Open Security*, April 15, 2014, http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/hameed-hakimi/left-behind-rural-youth-in-afghanistan's-election.

263 Bose, "Afghan youth: challenges to development."

264 Ibid.

265 Spencer Ackerman, "The Taliban Pays Its Troops Better than Karzai Pays His," *Wired*, July 26, 2010, http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/2010/07/taliban-pays-its-troops-better-than-karzai-pays-his/.

266 "High university enrollment, low graduate employment: Analyzing the paradox in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka," *The Economist*, January 2014, 10, http://www.britishcouncil.in/sites/britishcouncil.in2/files/british_council_report_2014_jan.pdf.

267 Srinjoy Bose, "Afghan youth: challenges to development," *Himal South Asian,* April 16, 2014, http://himalmag.com/afghan-youth-challenges-development/.

competitive in the job market. As articulated by Alastair McKechnie, the former World Bank director for Afghanistan:

> Part of the problem is that for many people, they don't have the security of a regular job. I think there is part-time work around. But it's essentially daily work, which is inherently insecure, particularly if people have families to support and other commitments…People simply cannot afford to be unemployed.[268]

Today, more than 63 percent of young employees occupy temporary and uncertain positions of "apprentices" or "trainees" that require little or no legal obligation from their employers.[269]

H. BRAIN DRAIN

The limited access to higher education and employment opportunities, as well as growing insecurity in the country, has resulted in many students pursuing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees abroad. More than 5,000 Afghan students study in a diverse range of countries, including Germany, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.[270] Overseas education is an extremely expensive option, particularly if students enroll in higher education in developed countries. It also contributes to the brain drain, as many Afghan students who travel overseas or are granted scholarships abroad fail to return, and take up jobs in foreign countries. Although the United States has provided scholarships, including the Fulbright, the reality is that "becoming a scholarship guarantee [for Afghan youth] has been like getting a free ticket to jump from the United States to seek asylum in Canada."[271] Afghan

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268 "Afghanistan: Time to move to Sustainable jobs," *International Labor Organization*, May 2012, 29-30, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_182253.pdf.

269 Ibid., 32.

270 C.P.S. Chauhan, "Higher Education: Current Status and Future Possibilities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives. Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka," *Analytical Reports in International Education*, 2 (1) 2008, 15, http://aried.info/00ISSUES/BACK/2008/0201-March2008/PDF/Ch2-Chauhan-29–48.pdf.

271 Malali Bashir, "Asylum Concerns Haunt Western Exchange Programs For Afghan Students," *RFEL*, February 25, 2012, http://www.rferl.org/content/afghan_student_exchange_western/24496031.html.

students are often offered scholarships and fellowships to study abroad, with the expectation that they will return to Afghanistan after their study programs are over. The reality, however, is that the majority of these youth never return or simply disappear before the program ends. A grim future for Afghanistan has prompted students to leave the program and apply for asylum in other countries. Harris Najib, a former Fulbright scholar working as a case manager with a nonprofit in Calgary, Canada, is one of the students who opted out of returning to Afghanistan. His reason was the political turmoil embroiling the country and a lack of job prospects.[272] In response to the staggering dropout rates among Afghan youth, the State Department suspended the Youth Exchange and Study Program (also known as the YES Program) in 2011. More than half the students reportedly applied for asylum to Canada.[273] Meetra Alakozy, a former alumnus of the YES program who returned to Afghanistan, expresses consternation about the future in her country:

> I am worried about NATO forces leaving, because I know that if they leave, [the] Afghan army is not that powerful to maintain the security in Afghanistan. As an Afghan girl, there will be challenges for me. Maybe I cannot go out again, maybe I cannot go study, if they leave and if Taliban come because ... then I cannot go to school anymore, I have to stay home, I cannot work and I cannot do anything, so I am worried about it.[274]

Ethnic Hazaras, who have experienced decades of discrimination and violence, have also been migrating—both legally and illegally—at staggering numbers to European countries.[275] In a recent interview with Al Jazeera, one young man lamented, “The situation is so bad that we can’t even bring back the skills we will gain [in training] to our own country.” [276] Psychologically, Afghan

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272 Ibid.

273 Quil Lawrence, “U.S. Quietly Halts Scholarship For Afghan Students,” *NPR*, July 14, 2011, http://www.npr.org/2011/07/14/137648917/u-s-quietly-halts-scholarship-for-afghan-students.

274 Ibid.

275 Bose, “Afghan youth: challenges to development.”

276 Ibid.

youth are placed in a Catch-22: Why would they risk returning to Afghanistan, given the current and future uncertainties?

As youth continue exiting the country in large numbers, the brain drain depletes the stock of well-educated Afghans available as academics for the universities. Many young professors who have studied in the West and are updated on the educational curriculum have either left the country or are working for international NGOs for huge sums of money.[277] The struggle has therefore been how to retain graduates whose earning potential and standard of living are considerably higher overseas.

I. CONCLUSION

There are significant challenges in higher education that the government and U.S. aid agencies have not addressed. Afghan youth constitute the majority demographic in Afghanistan, and neglecting their needs and concerns spells a recipe for disaster. Failing to address educational problems, including an inability to absorb student enrollment, poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, unqualified instructors, unemployment, religious radicalization, and insecurity, encourages many Afghan youth to flee the country or join the insurgency.

[277] Ibid.

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V. SUMMARY RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

A. SUMMARY RESULTS

Modernization theory asserts that when people in a traditional society become educated, the society grows more stabilized and the chances of democratization increase. The Afghan constitution states that education is a universal right for all citizens, and therefore tuition is free, from the primary to tertiary levels. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the number of universities, teachers, and students ballooned. Nevertheless, the educational system faces many problems that, combined with the youth bulge, present a host of concerns for the country. Despite attempts to improve higher education in Afghanistan, challenges remain, including an inability to absorb student enrollment, poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, unqualified instructors, religious radicalization, insecurity, and high youth unemployment. Mass protests in universities, the brain drain, and increasing numbers of youth joining the insurgency all point to the failure of both the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although higher education has progressed since the fall of the Taliban, the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies can do much more to address the concerns and interests of Afghan youth. It is understandable that not all students will receive an education or have a job after graduation, so it is important to set realistic aims in dealing with the following problems.

1. Inability to Absorb Student Enrollment and Public Universities

The public university cannot realistically absorb all high-school graduates, so students who are not admitted need viable options. Although private universities are a good alternative, there must be strong regulation and oversight to ensure that these universities are providing quality education with good job prospects for university graduates, and not merely seeking to maximize profits.

Private universities can use their resources to set high benchmarks that meet the standards of prestigious international institutions.

A promising approach for Afghanistan may come from nearby Pakistan, where the government has successfully partnered with many private universities to address growing student demand without overloading the public budget. The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) provided funding for private universities to improve the quality of the curricula.[278] Strengthening relations with the private sector is the best bet for the Afghan government as well, because it will enable the government to monitor and hold private universities accountable. These schools should be collaborating, not competing.

2. Poor Infrastructure

Bangladesh provides a model of how Afghanistan might skip development steps by facilitating Internet connectivity. In the past three decades, much of the infrastructure in public universities was damaged, looted, or destroyed. Although rebuilding will require considerable time, the Afghan government can meanwhile incorporate the Bangladeshi model. The Bangladeshi government established the Bangladesh Higher Education Quality Enhancement Project to provide high-speed Internet connectivity within the country and create a digital library subscribing to international electronic resources such JSTOR, World Cat, and Emerald. Internet access compensates for the lack of physical books and allows universities the means to catch up with knowledge in other countries.

An aspect of the SHEP program mentioned in Chapter IV was to improve facilities and laboratories in twelve partner universities. Although some of these universities progressed, the government and aid agencies must monitor the program's progress toward its objectives and follow up to see whether students and faculty are satisfied. If so, funding should be increased for the program so remaining universities can have their facilities fixed as well.

278 "Higher Education in Afghanistan: An Emerging Mountainscape," 23.

3. Outdated Curricula

The Afghan government and the SHEP program have taken proactive steps to update curricula in the majority of public universities, but more needs to be done to make curricula relevant. One possible solution is implementing what Suranaree University of Technology in Thailand has done as a form of cooperative education. As part of the program, students enrolled in a particular degree program also work full-time as employees at a worksite. Students are also expected to take a minimum of two trimesters of cooperative study. The program produces students who are more job-ready and curricula that adapt quickly to market changes.

Building partnerships with other international higher institutions is another way to improve curricula in universities. In 2005, the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) met with Kabul Medical University (KMU) administrators to revamp dated curricula. Six health professionals from Afghanistan went to UNMC to learn about best new practices in medical care and student education. UNMC also sent medical-school textbooks to replace obsolete materials.[279] The only problem with sending medical textbooks in English is the question of translation to Dari and Pashto for student use. The point, however, is that an Afghan university with international relationships can pilot a new curriculum, consolidate what they learned, and submit it for approval by the MoHE, which will distribute it to universities throughout the country.

4. Unqualified Instructors

Most of the talented instructors have fled Afghanistan—first during the Soviet occupation, then during the civil war between mujahedeen factions, and most recently in the Taliban era. Instructors who are not qualified or trained in the latest information related to their subject prevent students from acquiring the best education. Workshops should be available to help teachers improve their

[279] Karen Burbach, "Afghan leaders visit, explore UNMC curriculum," *UNMC*, October 10, 2005, http://app1.unmc.edu/publicaffairs/todaysite/sitefiles/today_full.cfm?match=2385.

pedagogical skills. The MOHE and U.S. aid agencies should allocate more funds to skills development for professors, so that teachers are current in their subject.

Teachers must often work multiple jobs, because salaries at a public university are not enough to maintain a decent standard of living. Not only should instructor salaries be increased, but incentives for doing a good job also need to be created. One possible suggestion is competitive, conditional, and performance-based funding for instructors. In 2013, the U.S. spent $23 million in Afghan teacher-training colleges; this has been a step in the right direction.[280]

Public universities need to build relationships with international universities and have exchange programs in which instructors can learn new teaching methods. The SHEP program has proven highly effective in sending instructors abroad and imparting new insights. With SHEP funding at Balkh University, Professor Farida Ansari was one of about 20 professors who went abroad to complete her master's degree and Ph.D at a Turkish university. She stated that her experience enabled her discover innovative ways of teaching her students.[281] Another professor from Balkh University, Mohammad Shah, shared similar feelings about teaching abroad through the SHEP program:

> It was the first time that I went outside Afghanistan to study, and I realized how we could do so many things better," he says. "Not only were foreign teaching methods different and the facilities so good, but we also learned about other cultures. Without this contact with the outside world, we cannot reach higher peaks of knowledge.[282]

As of 2013, more than 345 faculty members have received their master's degrees. Of that figure, 134 completed their degree in country, while the remaining 211 finished abroad.[283] The SHEP program should be expanded to

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280 Nathan Hodge and Habib Khan Totakhil, "U.S. Funds buy no love at Afghan College," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 2013, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323998604578567823216827676.

281 "Staff Development Results in Better Teaching Methods at Balkh University," *World Bank*, October 28, 2013, http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/10/28/staff-development-results-in-better-teaching-methods-at-balkh-university.

282 Ibid.

283 World Bank, *Report No: ICR00002859*," 4.

more universities, because of its relative success rate with the twelve partner universities.

The United States should also encourage partnerships with Western universities so that instructors can acquire greater teaching skills and be updated with the latest knowledge. One successful partnership was between San Diego State University (SDSU) and Nangarhar University (NU). The World Bank provided SDSU more than $4 million to aid NU, including funding of an English-language program and a redesign of the outdated engineering program to accelerate rebuilding efforts and create a better-educated work force. What made the partnership successful was that SDSU gave NU full ownership of the program. [284]

SDSU listened to what the needs of NU faculty, students, and administrators and shaped its strategy accordingly—not the other way around. The partnership was centered on the local needs of NU and not some universal blueprint.

Another possible course of action for the Afghan government is to emulate Pakistan by offering instructors a performance-based, tenure-track system.

> Tenure Track provides an opportunity for life-time employment following a certain number of years of teaching, which may be viewed as a trial period. The Tenure Track System has been institutionalized in almost 90 percent of all public universities and higher education institutes in the country. The system is applied to all new faculty appointments, while existing faculty have the opportunity to apply for it.[285]

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284 "Nangarhar University–San Diego State University Partnership," *World Bank*, December 2008, http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCkQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Finterwork.sdsu.edu%2Fnangarhar%2Fresources%2FFinal_MOHE_Case_Study12–29–08.doc&ei=57eCU462CcfooASR64HYAg&usg=AFQjCNFBObXLU9wkR-tcfIfGdiY3beH49g&sig2=a6-NKuUZdzBvuPonOgHSKg&bvm=bv.67720277,d.cGU.

285 "Higher Education in Afghanistan: An Emerging Mountainscape," 27.

5. Corruption

Corruption in higher education must be addressed. Based on the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which serves as the country's principal document for development efforts to reach the Millennium Development Goals set by the United Nations, the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies recognize that "corruption undermin[es] the accountability of government, erod[es] public trust and reduc[es] the legitimacy of state institutions."[286] The ANDS report also acknowledges that corruption is a crosscutting issue, and so the ministries of education, higher education, and finance need to implement institutional reforms to minimize, if not entirely prevent, its occurrence. The Basic Education Support Systems for Teachers (BESST) is a USAID-funded program that was initiated and was specifically designed to "modernize the university entrance exam system, develop an electronic bank transfer system for teacher salaries and create forgery-proof university diplomas."[287] Other aspects of the BESST program include addressing low teacher pay and non-merit-based hiring, initiating management-training courses for faculty members, and formulating competency tests for principals and teachers. The program ended in August 2011, but the momentum continues with follow-up projects and activities.

To better monitor the educational system and expose ghost teachers, the MoE developed an Education Management Information System (EMIS) that registers employees properly by profession, position, and work location. Both the MoE and MoHE have begun to expand EMIS capabilities to monitor student enrollment, exam attendance, and teacher attendance. The MoF has also initiated a program called the Afghanistan Financial Management Information System (AFMIS) to monitor funds allocated to education, both at the central and regional levels.[288]

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286 Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, *Afghanistan National Development Strategy 1387–1391 (2008-2013) Volume I* (Kabul: Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007), 103.

287 Hall, "Corruption & Afghanistan's Education Sector," 4.

288 Ibid., 4–5.

The Accountability and Transparency program (ACT), established by the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies, also focuses on increasing transparency in education. The MoE created the Office for Anti-Corruption Implementation Plan, in which six complaint offices were opened in Kabul, including ministries and directorates for city education, technical and vocational education, Kabul Province education, Islamic education, and literacy and teacher training. As a result of their collaboration, in 2011 more than 168 out of 216 complaints received were resolved. The majority of the complaints dealt with bribery, abuse of power, and delays in services and resources.[289]

The Afghan government and U.S. agencies have taken needed steps to address corruption in education. If these programs are successful in increasing transparency in funds allocation, eliminating ghost teachers, and stopping bribery, then they need to be continued, especially if they have expired or are on the brink.

6. Religious Radicalization

The United States presently emphasizes education reform in Afghanistan as a means of countering radical Islam and promulgating democratization. Combatting radicalization requires providing alternate curricula. The United States has achieved this at the primary and secondary level, but has neglected curriculum reform at the university level. The Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies need to be extremely careful about endorsing Western liberal practices, especially in conservative universities such as Jalalabad, Khost, and Takhar. Some Western policymakers assume that Afghan society can be morphed "into a Westernized one by implementing co-education, organizing concerts and unnecessary intermingling of boys and girls, and changing dress codes."[290] Promoting such practices is highly counterproductive and can lead to a backlash

289 Ibid., 5–6.

290 "Preventing Youth Radicalization in East Africa," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, January 22–27, 2012, 5, http://africacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/PreventingYouthRadicalizationProgramReport-2012.pdf.

among conservative segments of the population. Afghan history demonstrates how resistant Afghans are to liberal, Western ideas. Instead, the focus should be to respect the cultural and religious norms that are paramount to Afghans.

One approach that Afghanistan can take to mitigate religious extremism has been demonstrated by East Africa. Similar to Afghanistan, East Africa is experiencing a burgeoning youth population and dealing with violent extremist organizations that have extended their influence throughout the country. East Africa initiated several high-level workshops to "foster a deeper understanding of the drivers of youth radicalization in the region and to generate policy recommendations aimed at decreasing the appeal of violent extremist groups."[291] Many key stakeholders participated, including East African government officials, civil-society groups, and other attendees who offered various perspectives from "military, intelligence, law enforcement, development, culture, communications, and civil society backgrounds."[292] One takeaway from the Preventing Youth Radicalization workshop was that technology can be leveraged to resist extremist propaganda and endorse alternative options to religious extremism. Another lesson learned was that religion is not inherently a source of violence and that the goal should therefore be to use the religion itself to promote a positive message. Applying such an idea could work well for Afghanistan. There are a plethora of verses in the Quran that condemn the killing of innocent civilians, and that message is what the Afghan government should try to disseminate through social media and online forums. For instance, chapter five, verse 32 of the Holy Quran states:

> We ordained for the Children of Israel that if any one slew a person—unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land—it would be as if he slew the whole people: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people.[293]

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291 Ibid., 5–6

292 Ibid.

293 Quran 5:32.

This verse provides irrefutable proof that not only does Islam condemn the killing of the innocent, but it makes a clear statement that killing one innocent person is as though you killed all of humanity. While the Taliban might use other verses from the Quran to justify their actions, the Afghan government should consistently spread Quranic verses that refute the Taliban's claims.

The Taliban continue to resist government-backed schools, amid claims that they endorse anti-Islamic teachings and subjects.[294] Physical attacks or threats against universities and their staff hinder learning directly and indirectly. Since the Taliban will reject any compromise with the Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies, security needs to be provided to youth who are attending university, in the form of increased security personnel at the schools and bus transportation to and from.

A 2013 report by Human Rights Watch offers valuable recommendations that the Afghan government can implement to mitigate security risks. The report recommended that the Afghan government collaborate with other agencies, including the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, UNICEF, UNDP, and UNIFEM, to implement a strategy to monitor, deter, and respond to attacks on education. The report also suggested that the ministry of education and international agencies establish a national database with current information gathered from provincial educational offices. Using the data gained from monitoring, the government and international agencies should focus on schools that are most at risk of attack and ensure they are provided with resources and security. Other suggestions include getting the local community involved by setting up rotating shifts of volunteer night watchmen and installing monitors along the roads at the times students go to and from school. The final recommendation is to respond quickly and forcefully to attacks, by conducting investigations and prosecuting the perpetrators. To restore confidence among

294 Other groups including warlords, militias, and criminal groups are also worsening insecurity and the plight of schools in Afghanistan.

students and faculty, the government should also immediately rebuild damaged schools that were attacked.

Although security is an integral prerequisite to education, it cannot be achieved solely through force. The Taliban are neither a monolithic group nor adherents to a central command. As a result of factionalism within the Taliban, authorities have been able to negotiate to keep some of the schools open. According to a report by IRIN:

> Asif Nang, a spokesman for the Ministry of Education, told IRIN the government was ready to negotiate with the opposition over schools and would be willing to accommodate their religious reservations. "If they want schools called "madrasa" we will accept that, if they want to say Mullah to a teacher we no problem with that. Whatever objections they [the Taliban] may have we are ready to talk to them," Nang said. The Ministry of Education also emphasized that its curriculum was entirely in accordance with Islamic values and girls were required to comply with Islamic dressing codes (including wearing the hijab) to school. Owing to this appeasing approach, the government has reopened 24 schools in Helmand, Ghazni and Kandahar provinces previously shut by insurgents.[295]

In certain instances, it might be possible to enter negotiate with the local Taliban to allow students to go to school. The military route should not be the only option, especially if some Taliban factions are amenable to allowing school attendance so long as the schools meet their Islamic standards. The Afghan government should therefore capitalize on this tendency and attempt to engage in dialogue with those Taliban who are willing.

7. Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment is a major issue in Afghanistan, especially for university graduates. The Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies must establish proper mechanisms that will provide Afghan youth access to jobs after graduation. Otherwise, an unemployed but educated youth population becomes just as potentially destabilizing as masses of uneducated, unemployed youth.

295 Morten Sigsgaard, "Education and Fragility in Afghanistan," 19.

Oftentimes, students are not aware of open jobs, particularly government jobs. A recent survey by Samuel Hall, a research and consulting company in Afghanistan, revealed that the young often hear about employment vacancies through family members or friends.[296] Suggestions include publicly announcing job vacancies and using the media to disperse information regarding vacant positions. Universities should be encouraged to offer workshops on resumes and networking techniques. Weak resumes often stop Afghan youth from landing good jobs, because applicants are not aware of what should appear in a resume or how to make themselves attractive to companies.

Building more vocational schools, in which students are taught the skills needed to perform a particular job, is another option. In 2008–2009, there were 33 vocational schools, 6,606 students and 497 teachers, which increased to 97 vocational schools 14,056 students and 732 teachers by 2011.[297]

C. CONCLUDING POINTS

Improving Afghanistan's higher-education system requires strategic planning by the Afghan and U.S. governments, but it can be done. SHEP has been a step in the right direction, but needs better funding to accommodate public universities that are struggling with poor infrastructure, outdated curricula, unqualified instructors and lax security. The Afghan government and U.S. aid agencies must attack all of the root causes of "youth bulge" and formulate a higher education plan in a coordinated, systematic way with indicators and metrics for improvement. Certain aspects should be handled by NGOs on a competitive bid basis and overseen by the Afghan government and the communities/universities being affected.

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296 Afghanistan's Future in Transition: A Participatory Assessment of Afghan Youth," *Samuel Hall Consulting,* 2013,99, http://samuelhall.org/REPORTS/Future%20in%20Transition:%20A%20Participatory%20Assessment%20of%20the%20Afghan%20Youth.pdf.

297 Rahima Baharustani, "Comprehensive Study of Higher Education in Afghanistan," Afghanistan *Investment Support Agenc*y, December 2012, 4, http://www.aisa.org.af/study/Comprehensive%20study%20of%20Higher%20Education%20in%20Afghanistan_2.pdf.

Although tremendous progress has been made since 2001, youth in Afghanistan remain skeptical of their future, due to lack of high quality education and jobs. While some have engaged in protests, many others have fled the country or joined the insurgency. In light of the impending U.S. troop withdrawal, Afghan youth must not be neglected. This large segment of the population will either rebuild Afghanistan or become the country's greatest source of instability.

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